

**ISAAC  
ASIMOV**

PRESENTS

**THE GREAT  
SF STORIES**

24

(1962)

EDITED BY

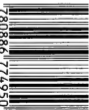
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ASIMOV  
PRESENTS  
THE GREAT  
SF STORIES  
#24**

**(1962)**

**EDITED BY ISAAC ASIMOV  
AND MARTIN H. GREENBERG**

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# INTRODUCTION

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In the world outside reality it was a year of great accomplishments but one marked by a crisis that some feel came close to plunging the world into nuclear war—the Cuban missile crisis of October. But the Soviets blinked, the missiles left Castro's island, we all let out a breath of relief. On the other hand, John Glenn orbited the Earth not once, not twice, but three times in 1962, and Adolf Eichmann was hanged for crimes against humanity. U Thant became Secretary-General of the United Nations, and there was an unsuccessful attempt to kill President Charles de Gaulle of France.

The United States got U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers back from Soviet captivity in a swap for Soviet master spy Rudolf Abel. The number of countries in the world grew as Tanganyika (later Tanzania) and Uganda became independent of British colonial rule. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled against formal prayer in public schools and added Arthur Goldberg and Byron White to the bench. James Meredith integrated the University of Mississippi with the aid of 3,000 federal troops.

The top movies of 1962 included *Advise and Consent*, Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*, *The Longest Day*, John Frankenheimer's *Birdman of Alcatraz*, the wildly over-budget *Cleopatra* with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, *Lawrence of Arabia*, directed by Academy Award winning David Lean, *To Kill a Mockingbird* with Gregory Peck, Orson Welles' *The Trial*, and *The Miracle Worker*, which won an Oscar for Anne Bancroft for her riveting portrayal of Ann Sullivan. Doris Day was the leading box-office attraction of the year.

In 1962 Jack Nicklaus defeated Arnold Palmer in a playoff to take the U.S. Open, while Decidedly, with Willie Hartack aboard, won the Kentucky Derby. Maury Wills broke Ty Cobbs' 1915 record by stealing 104 bases, as the Boston Celtics beat the Los Angeles Lakers to become National Basketball Association Champions. The New York Yankees beat the San Francisco Giants in a thrilling seven game series to become the champions of baseball. Wilt Chamberlain of Philadelphia poured in 100 points in a regular season NBA game while Rod Laver of Australia won the French, Italian, U.S., and British opens—tennis' Grand Slam. Bart Starr and Jim Taylor of Marty's Green Bay Packers led the National Football League in passing and rushing, and Willie Mays led the Majors in home runs with 49. The ill-fated Sonny Liston knocked out Floyd Patterson to win the heavy-weight boxing championship of the world.

Leading books of 1962 included Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns Of August*, which won a Pulitzer Prize, John Steinbeck's *Travels With Charley, Fail-Safe* (which could have been published in the real world) by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, *Another Country* by James Baldwin, *Sex And The Single Girl* by Helen Gurley Brown, William Faulkner's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Reivers*, Alexander Solzhenit-

syn's classic *One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich*, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions*, and *Thinking About The Unthinkable* by Herman Kahn. John Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In the finer arts, Andy Warhol painted "Four Campbell Soup Cans" and "Gold Marilyn Monroe," while Rudolf Nureyev debuted in an American production of *Don Quixote*. 1962 saw the construction of the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and of Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center in New York, the latter in Isaac's neighborhood. The legitimate theater saw the opening of such excellent plays and musicals as *A Thousand Clowns*, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Harold Rome's *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey.

The year in television was highlighted by the debut of such successful shows as "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson," "The Virginian," "McHale's Navy" with the great Ernest Borgnine, the flaccid "Andy Williams Hour," and the immortal "The Beverly Hillbillies." In a major development, Walter Cronkite replaced the durable Douglas Edwards as "anchor" on the CBS Evening News—he was destined to become one of the most trusted people in the United States.

Scientific advances included the launch of Mariner 2 toward Venus, the arrival of Ranger IV on the Moon, and especially the launch of Telstar, the communications satellite that would mark the dawn of instantaneous television broadcasting on a global scale. Nobel Prizes went to Lev Landau of the Soviet Union in Physics for his work with condensed gases; to Crick, Wilkins, and Watson in Medicine and Physiology for their breakthrough work in the molecular structure of DNA; and to Perutz and Kendrew in

Chemistry for their research in determining the molecular structure of hemoglobin. In 1962 Rachel Carson published her influential *Silent Spring*, warning of the effects of insecticides. The risks of science became apparent with the effects of the drug Thalidomide on the children of the women who took it.

Hit songs of 1962 included Neil Sedaka's "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do," "Shout! Shout!," "Go Away Little Girl," "Fly Me To The Moon," "I Left My Heart In San Francisco," Bob Dylan's "Blowin' In The Wind," Little Eva's "Loco-Motion," and the haunting "Days Of Wine And Roses," from the movie of the same name.

The first K Mart opened in 1962, and diet colas like Tab and Diet Rite made their appearance.

Death took Niels Bohr, Moss Hart, Bruno Walter, Ernie Kovacs, e.e. cummings, Fritz Kreisler, William Faulkner, Marilyn Monroe, Hermann Hesse, Charles Laughton, Robinson Jeffers, Kirsten Flagstad, Queen Wilhelmina, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

There were an estimated 3,100,000,000 people on Earth.

In the real world it was another good year as the paperback explosion continued.

Notable books published in 1962 include *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess, *The Wall Around The World* (collection) by Theodore R. Cogswell, *Island* by Aldous Huxley, *After Doomsday* by Poul Anderson, *The Hugo Winners* edited by our own Isaac Asimov, *The Eleventh Commandment* by Lester del Rey, *A Wrinkle In Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, *The Man In The High Castle* by Philip K. Dick, *Little Fuzzy* by H. Beam Piper, *Joyleg* by Avram Davidson and Ward Moore, *The Mouse On The Moon*, by Leonard Wibberley, *The Girl, The Gold Watch & Everything* by the multi-talented John D. MacDonald, *The Expert Dreamers* edited by Frederik Pohl, *Journey*

*Beyond Tomorrow* by Robert Sheckley, *A Century Of Science Fiction* edited by Damon Knight, *Or All The Seas With Oysters* (collection) by Avram Davidson, *The Mathematical Magpie* edited by Clifton Fadiman, *The Diploids* (collection) by Katherine MacLean, *Great Science Fiction By Scientists* edited by Groff Conklin, *Spectrum*, the first of a distinguished series, edited by Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest, and *Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot* by "Grendel Briarton" (Reginald Bretnor).

It was a stagnant year for the science fiction magazines, although Ed Ferman began a fine editorial career by becoming Managing Editor at *The Magazine Of Fantasy And Science Fiction*, and Sol Cohen became Publisher at *Galaxy*. In a major purchase, Conde Nast acquired Street & Smith Publications, assuring the survival of *Analog*.

In the real world, more important people made their maiden voyages into reality: in February—Joseph L. Green with "The Engineer"; in May—Terry Carr with "Who Sups With the Devil"; in August—Roger Zelazny with two stories, "Horseman" and "Passion Play"; in September—Ursula K. Le Guin with "April in Paris"; and in October—Thomas M. Disch with "The Double-Timer."

Fantastic films (in terms of category, not always quality) included *Moon Pilot*, Marty's favorites *The Three Stooges Meet Hercules* and *The Three Stooges In Orbit*, *The Underwater City* with the beautiful Julie Adams, *Journey To The Seventh Planet* with future cult favorite John Agar, *The Road To Hong Kong* (yes, it qualifies) with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, the not very fearsome *Mothra*, the excellent and underrated *Panic In The Year Zero* starring and directed by Ray Milland, *Dr. No*, the first of the James Bond film series, *The Manchurian Candidate*, the best sf film of the year, based on an excellent

book that would have been called a "techno thriller" today, *First Spaceship On Venus*, and *Varan The Unbelievable* (it should have been titled *Varan The Unwatchable*) with Myron Healy as Commander James Bradley.

On television, *A For Andromeda* was a "mini" series on British TV and *Out Of This World* debuted as a decent series, also in Great Britain, who had by far the best new sf available on television in 1962.

The Family (all 550 of them) gathered in Chicago for the Twentieth World Science Fiction Convention—Chicon 3. Hugos (awarded for achievements in 1961) included *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert A. Heinlein as Best Novel; "The Hothouse Series" by Brian W. Aldiss as Best Short Fiction; *The Twilight Zone* as Best Dramatic Presentation; *Analog* as Best Professional Magazine; Ed Emshwiller as Best Professional Artist; and a Special Award to Cele Goldsmith for editing *Amazing* and *Fantastic*.

Let us travel back to that honored year of 1962 and enjoy the best stories that the real world bequeathed to us.

# THE INSANE ONES

---

BY J. G. BALLARD (1930- )

AMAZING  
JANUARY

*1962 was a terrific year for J. G. Ballard, at least in terms of published science fiction and fantasy—two of what I consider to be his best novels, *The Wind From Nowhere* and *The Drowned World*, were published that year, along with his first two collections—*The Voices Of Time And Other Stories* and *Billionium And Other Stories*, both containing wonderful fiction from his great early years. In fact, the early 1960s were a particularly rich period for him, seeing the appearance of such masterpieces as “*The Cage of Sand*,” “*Chronopolis*,” “*The Garden of Time*,” “*The Overloaded Man*,” “*Passport to Eternity*,” “*The Sound-Sweep*,” “*Thirteen to Centaurus*,” and the stunning “*The Voices of Time*.”*

*A goodly number of his best early stories, including “*The Insane Ones*,” appeared in *Amazing*, not exactly the most sought-after market in those days, an indication that innovative and experimental sf had difficulty finding a home thirty years ago.*

Ten miles outside Alexandria he picked up the coast road that ran across the top of the continent through

Tunis and Algiers to the transatlantic tunnel at Casablanca, gunned the Jaguar up to 120 and burned along through the cool night air, letting the brine-filled slipstream cut into his six-day tan. Lolling back against the headrest as the palms flicked by, he almost missed the girl in the white raincoat waving from the steps of the hotel at El Alamein, had only three hundred yards to plunge the car to a halt below the rusting neon sign.

"Tunis?" the girl called out, belting the man's raincoat around her trim waist, long black hair in a Left Bank cut over one shoulder.

"Tunis—Casablanca—Atlantic City," Gregory shouted back, reaching across to the passenger door. She swung a yellow briefcase behind the seat, settling herself among the magazines and newspapers as they roared off. The headlamps picked out a United World cruiser parked under the palms in the entrance to the war cemetery, and involuntarily Gregory winced and floored the accelerator, eyes clamped to the rear mirror until the road was safely empty.

At 90 he slacked off and looked at the girl, abruptly felt a warning signal sound again. She seemed like any demi-beatnik, with a long melancholy face and gray skin, but something about her rhythms, the slack facial tone and dead eyes and mouth, made him uneasy. Under a flap of the raincoat was a blue-striped gingham skirt, obviously part of a nurse's uniform, out of character like the rest of her strange gear. As she slid the magazines into the dashboard locker he saw the homemade bandage around the left wrist.

She noticed him watching her and flashed a too-bright smile, then made an effort at small talk.

"Paris Vogue, Neue Frankfurter, Tel Aviv Express—you've really been moving." She pulled a pack of Del Montes from the breast pocket of the

coat, fumbled unfamiliarly with a large brass lighter. "First Europe, then Asia, now Africa. You'll run out of continents soon." Hesitating, she volunteered: "Carole Sturgeon. Thanks for the lift."

Gregory nodded, watching the bandage slide around her slim wrist. He wondered which hospital she had sneaked away from. Probably Cairo General, the old-style English uniforms were still worn there. Ten to one the briefcase was packed with some careless salesman's pharmaceutical samples. "Can I ask where you're going? This is the back end of nowhere."

The girl shrugged. "Just following the road. Cairo, Alex, you know—" She added: "I went to see the pyramids." She lay back, rolling slightly against his shoulder. "That was wonderful. They're the oldest things on earth. Remember their boast: '*Before Abraham, I was*'?"

They hit a dip in the road and Gregory's license swung out under the steering column. The girl peered down and read it. "Do you mind? It's a long ride to Tunis. 'Charles Gregory, M.D.—'" She stopped, repeating the name to herself uncertainly.

Suddenly she remembered. "*Gregory!* Dr. Charles Gregory! Weren't you—Muriel Bortman, the President's daughter, she drowned herself at Key West, you were sentenced—" She broke off, staring nervously at the windshield.

"You've got a long memory," Gregory said quietly. "I didn't think anyone remembered."

"Of course I remember." She spoke in a whisper. "They were mad what they did to you." For the next few minutes she gushed out a long farrago of sympathy, interspersed with disjointed details from her own life. Gregory tried not to listen, clenching the wheel until his knuckles whitened, deliberately forgetting everything as fast as she reminded him.

There was a pause, as he felt it coming, the way it

invariably did. "Tell me, doctor, I hope you forgive me asking, but since the Mental Freedom laws it's difficult to get help, one's got to be so careful—you too, of course . . ." She laughed uneasily. "What I really mean is—"

Her edginess drained power from Gregory. "—you need psychiatric assistance," he cut in, pushing the Jaguar up to 95, eyes swinging to the rear mirror again. The road was dead, palms receding endlessly into the night.

The girl choked on her cigarette, the stub between her fingers a damp mess. "Well, not me," she said lamely. "A close friend of mine. She really needs help, believe me, doctor. Her whole feeling for life is gone, nothing seems to mean anything to her any more."

Brutally, he said: "Tell her to look at the pyramids."

But the girl missed the irony, said quickly: "Oh, she has. I just left her in Cairo. I promised I'd try to find someone for her." She turned to examine Gregory, put a hand up to her hair. In the blue desert light she reminded him of the madonnas he had seen in the Louvre two days after his release, when he had run from the filthy prison searching for the most beautiful things in the world, the solemn-faced more-than-beautiful 13-year-olds who had posed for Leonardo and the Bellini brothers. "I thought perhaps you might know someone—?"

He gripped himself and shook his head. "I don't. For the last three years I've been out of touch. Anyway, it's against the MF laws. Do you know what would happen if they caught me giving psychiatric treatment?"

Numbly the girl stared ahead at the road. Gregory flipped away his cigarette, pressing down on the accelerator as the last three years crowded back, memories he had hoped to repress on his 10,000-mile drive . . . three years at the prison farm near Marseilles, treating scrofulous farm-workers and sailors in the dispensary, even

squeezing in a little illicit depth analysis for the corporal of police who couldn't satisfy his wife, three embittered years to accept that he would never practice again the one craft in which he was fully himself. Trick-cyclist or assuager of discontents, whatever his title, the psychiatrist had now passed into history, joining the necromancers, sorcerers, and other practitioners of the black sciences.

The Mental Freedom legislation enacted ten years earlier by the ultra-conservative UW government had banned the profession outright and enshrined the individual's freedom to be insane if he wanted to, provided he paid the full civil consequences for any infringements of the law. That was the catch, the hidden object of the MF laws. What had begun as a popular reaction against 'subliminal living' and the uncontrolled extension of techniques of mass manipulation for political and economic ends had quickly developed into a systematic attack on the psychological sciences. Over-permissive courts of law with their condoning of delinquency, pseudo-enlightened penal reformers, "victims of society," the psychologist and his patient all came under fierce attack. Discharging their self-hate and anxiety onto a convenient scapegoat, the new rulers, and the great majority electing them, outlawed all forms of psychic control, from the innocent market survey to lobotomy. The mentally ill were on their own, spared pity and consideration, made to pay to the hilt for their failings. The sacred cow of the community was the psychotic, free to wander where he wanted, drooling on doorsteps, sleeping on sidewalks, and woe betide anyone who tried to help him.

Gregory had made that mistake. Escaping to Europe, first home of psychiatry, in the hope of finding a more tolerant climate, he set up a secret clinic

in Paris with six other émigré analysts. For five years they worked undetected, until one of Gregory's patients, a tall ungainly girl with a psychogenic stutter, was revealed to be Muriel Bortman, daughter of the UW President-General. The analysis had failed tragically when the clinic was raided; after her death a lavish show trial (making endless play of electric shock apparatus, movies of insulin coma and the testimony of countless paranoids rounded up in the alleyways) had concluded in a three year sentence.

Now at last he was out, his savings invested in the Jaguar, fleeing Europe and his memories of the prison for the empty highways of North Africa. He didn't want any more trouble.

"I'd like to help," he told the girl. "But the risks are too high. All your friend can do is try to come to terms with herself."

The girl chewed her lip fretfully. "I don't think she can. Thanks, anyway, doctor."

For three hours they sat back silently in the speeding car, until the lights of Tobruk came up ahead, the long curve of the harbor.

"It's 2 a.m.," Gregory said. "There's a motel here, I'll pick you up in the morning."

After they had gone to their rooms he sneaked back to the registry, booked himself into a new chalet. He fell asleep as Carole Sturgeon wandered forlornly up and down the verandas, whispering out his name.

After breakfast he came back from the sea, found a big United World cruiser in the court, orderlies carrying a stretcher out to an ambulance.

A tall Libyan police colonel was leaning against the Jaguar, drumming his leather baton on the windscreen.

"Ah, Dr. Gregory. Good morning." He pointed his

baton at the ambulance. "A profound tragedy, such a beautiful American girl."

Gregory rooted his feet in the gray sand, with an effort restrained himself from running over to the ambulance and pulling back the sheet. Fortunately the colonel's uniform and thousands of morning and evening cell inspections kept him safely to attention.

"I'm Gregory, yes," The dust thickened in his throat. "Is she dead?"

The colonel stroked his neck with the baton. "Ear to ear. She must have found an old razor blade in the bathroom. About 3 o'clock this morning." He headed towards Gregory's chalet, gesturing with the baton. Gregory followed him into the half light, stood tentatively by the bed.

"I was asleep then. The clerk will vouch for that."

"Naturally." The colonel gazed down at Gregory's possessions spread out across the bedcover, idly poked the black medical bag.

"She asked you for assistance, doctor? With her personal problems?"

"Not directly. She hinted at it, though. She sounded a little mixed up."

"Poor child." The colonel lowered his head sympathetically. "Her father is a first secretary at the Cairo Embassy, something of an autocrat. You Americans are very stern with your children, doctor. A firm hand, yes, but understanding costs nothing. Don't you agree? She was frightened of him, escaped from the American Hospital. My task is to provide an explanation for the authorities. If I had an idea of what was really worrying her . . . no doubt you helped her as best you could?"

Gregory shook his head. "I gave her no help at all, colonel. In fact, I refused to discuss her problems altogether." He smiled flatly at the colonel. "I wouldn't make the same mistake twice, would I?"

The colonel studied Gregory thoughtfully. "Sensible of you, doctor. But you surprise me. Surely the members of your profession regard themselves as a special calling, answerable to a higher authority. Are these ideals so easy to cast off?"

"I've had a lot of practice." Gregory began to pack away his things on the bed, bowed to the colonel as he saluted and made his way out into the court.

Half an hour later he was on the Benghazi road, holding the Jaguar at 100, working off his tension and anger in savage bursts of speed. Free for only ten days, already he had got himself involved again, gone through all the agony of having to refuse help to someone desperately needing it, his hands itching to administer relief to the child but held back by the insane penalties. It wasn't only the lunatic legislation but the people enforcing it who ought to be swept away—Bortman and his fellow oligarchs.

He grimaced at the thought of the cold dead-faced Bortman, addressing the World Senate at Lake Success, arguing for increased penalties for the criminal psychopath. The man had stepped straight out of the 14th Century Inquisition, his bureaucratic puritanism masking two real obsessions: dirt and death. Any sane society would have locked Bortman up forever, or given him a complete brain-lift. Indirectly Bortman was as responsible for the death of Carole Sturgeon as he would have been had he personally handed the razor blade to her.

After Libya, Tunis. He blazed steadily along the coast road, the sea like a molten mirror on the right, avoiding the big towns where possible. Fortunately they weren't so bad as the European cities, psychotics loitering like stray dogs in the uptown parks, wise enough not to shop-lift or cause trouble, but a petty

nuisance on the cafe terraces, knocking on hotel doors at all hours of the night.

At Algiers he spent three days at the Hilton, having a new engine fitted to the car, and hunted up Philip Kalundborg, an old Toronto colleague now working in a WHO children's hospital.

Over their third carafe of burgundy Gregory told him about Carole Sturgeon.

"It's absurd, but I feel guilty about her. Suicide is a highly suggestive act, I reminded her of Muriel Bortman's death. Damn it, Philip, I could have given her the sort of general advice any sensible layman would have offered."

"Dangerous. Of course you were right," Philip assured him. "After the last three years who could argue otherwise?"

Gregory looked out across the terrace at the traffic whirling over the neon-lit cobbles. Beggars sat at their pitches along the sidewalk, whining for sous.

"Philip, you don't know what it's like in Europe now. At least 5% are probably in need of institutional care. Believe me, I'm frightened to go to America. In New York alone they're jumping from the roofs at the rate of ten a day. The world's turning into a mad-house, one half of society gloating righteously over the torments of the other. Most people don't realize which side of the bars they are. It's easier for you. Here the traditions are different."

Kalundborg nodded. "True. In the villages up-country it's been standard practice for centuries to blind schizophrenics and exhibit them in a cage. Injustice is so widespread that you build up an indiscriminate tolerance to every form."

A tall dark-bearded youth in faded cotton slacks and rope sandals stepped across the terrace and put his hands on their table. His eyes were sunk deep

below his forehead, around his lips the brown staining of narcotic poisoning.

"Christian!" Kalundborg snapped angrily. He shrugged hopelessly at Gregory, then turned to the young man with quiet exasperation. "My dear fellow, this has gone on for too long. I can't help you, there's no point in asking."

The young man nodded patiently. "It's Marie," he explained in a slow roughened voice. "I can't control her. I'm frightened what she may do to the baby. Postnatal withdrawal, you know—"

"Nonsense! I'm not an idiot, Christian. The baby is nearly three. If Marie is a nervous wreck you've made her so. Believe me, I wouldn't help you if I was allowed to. You must cure yourself or you are finished. Already you have chronic barbiturism. Dr. Gregory here will agree with me."

Gregory nodded. The young man stared blackly at Kalundborg, glanced at Gregory and then shambled off through the tables.

Kalundborg filled his glass. "They have it all wrong today. They think our job was to further addiction, not cure it. In their pantheon the father-figure is always benevolent."

"That's invariably been Bortman's line. Psychiatry is ultimately self-indulgent, an encouragement to weakness and lack of will. Admittedly there's no one more single-minded than an obsessional neurotic. Bortman himself is a good example."

As he entered the tenth-floor bedroom the young man was going through his valise on the bed. For a moment Gregory wondered whether he was a UW spy, perhaps the meeting on the terrace had been an elaborate trap.

"Find what you want?"

Christian finished whipping through the bag, then

tossed it irritably onto the floor. He edged restlessly away from Gregory around the bed, his eyes hungrily searching the wardrobe top and lamp brackets.

"Kalundborg was right," Gregory told him quietly. "You're wasting your time."

"The hell with Kalundborg," Christian snarled softly. "He's working the wrong levels. Do you think I'm looking for a jazz heaven, doctor? With a wife and child? I'm not that irresponsible. I took a Master's degree in law at Heidelberg." He wandered off around the room, then stopped to survey Gregory closely.

Gregory began to slide in the drawers. "Well, get back to your jurisprudence. There are enough ills to weigh in this world."

"Doctor, I've made a start. Didn't Kalundborg tell you I sued Bortman for murder?" When Gregory seemed puzzled he explained: "A private civil action, not criminal proceedings. My father killed himself five years ago after Bortman had him thrown out of the Bar Association."

Gregory picked his valise off the floor. "I'm sorry," he said noncommittally. "What happened to your suit against Bortman?"

Christian stared out through the window into the dark air. "It was never entered. Some World Bureau investigators saw me after I started to be a nuisance and suggested I leave the States forever. So I came to Europe to get my degree. I'm on my way back now. I need the barbiturates to stop myself trying to toss a bomb at Bortman."

Suddenly he propelled himself across the room, before Gregory could stop him was out on the balcony, jack-knifed over the edge. Gregory dived after him, kicked away his feet and tried to pull him off the ledge. Christian clung to it, shouting into the dark-

ness, the lights from the cars racing in the damp street below. On the sidewalk people looked up.

Christian was doubled up with laughter as they fell back into the room, slumped down on the bed, pointing his finger at Gregory, who was leaning against the wardrobe, gasping in exhausted spasms.

"Big mistake there, doctor. You better get out fast before I tip off the Police Prefect. Stopping a suicide! God, with your record you'd get ten years for that. What a joke!"

Gregory shook him by the shoulders, temper flaring. "Listen, what are you playing at? What do you want?"

Christian pushed Gregory's hands away and lay back weakly. "Help me, doctor. I want to kill Bortman, it's all I think about. If I'm not careful I'll really try. Show me how to forget him." His voice rose desperately. "Damn, I *hated* my father, I was glad when Bortman threw him out."

Gregory eyed him thoughtfully, then went over to the window and bolted out the night.

Two months later, at the motel outside Casablanca, Gregory finally burned the last of the analysis notes. Christian, clean-shaven and wearing a neat white tropical suit, a neutral tie, watched from the door as the stack of coded entries gutted out in the ashtray, then carried them into the bathroom and flushed them away.

When Christian had loaded his suitcases into the car Gregory said: "One thing before we go. A complete analysis can't be effected in two months, let alone two years. It's something you work at all your life. If you have a relapse, come to me, even if I'm in Tahiti, or Shanghai or Archangel." Gregory paused. "If they ever find out, you know what will happen?" When

Christian nodded quietly he sat down in the chair by the writing table, gazing out through the date palms at the huge domed mouth of the transatlantic tunnel a mile away. For a long time he knew he would be unable to relax. In a curious way he felt that the three years at Marseilles had been wasted, that he was starting a suspended sentence of indefinite length. There had been no satisfaction at the successful treatment, perhaps because he had given in to Christian partly for fear of being incriminated in an attack on Bortman.

"With luck, you should be able to live with yourself now. Try to remember that whatever evils Bortman may perpetrate in the future he's irrelevant to *your* problem. It was the stroke your mother suffered after your father's death that made you realize the guilt you felt subconsciously for hating him, but you conveniently shifted the blame onto Bortman, and by eliminating him you thought you could free yourself. The temptation may occur again."

Christian nodded, standing motionlessly by the doorway. His face had filled out, his eyes were a placid gray. He looked like any well-groomed UW bureaucrat.

Gregory picked up a newspaper. "I see Bortman is attacking the American Bar Association as a subversive body, probably planning to have it proscribed. If it succeeds it'll be an irreparable blow to civil liberty." He looked up thoughtfully at Christian, who showed no reaction. "Right, let's go. Are you still fixed on getting back to the States?"

"Of course." Christian climbed into the car, then shook Gregory's hand. Gregory had decided to stay in Africa, find a hospital where he could work, and had given Christian the car. "Marie will wait for me in Algiers until I finish my business."

"What's that?"

Christian pressed the starter, sent a roar of dust and exhaust across the compound.

"I'm going to kill Bortman," he said quietly.

Gregory gripped the windscreen. "You're not serious."

"You cured me, doctor, and give or take the usual margins I'm completely sane, more than I probably ever will be again. Damn few people in this world are now, so that makes the obligation on me to act rationally even greater. Well, every ounce of logic tells me that someone's got to make the effort to get rid of the grim menagerie running things now, and Bortman looks like a pretty good start. I intend to drive up to Lake Success and take a shot at him." He shunted the gear change into second, and added, "Don't try to have me stopped, doctor, because they'll only dig out our long weekend here."

As he started to take his foot off the clutch Gregory shouted: "Christian! You'll never get away with it! They'll catch you anyway!" but the car wrenched forward out of his hand.

Gregory ran through the dust after it, stumbling over half-buried stones, realizing helplessly that when they caught Christian and probed down into the past few months they would soon find the real assassin, an exiled doctor with a a three-year grudge.

"Christian!" he yelled, choking on the white ash.

"Christian, you're insane!"

# CHRISTMAS TREASON

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BY JAMES WHITE (1928- )

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION  
JANUARY

*The Sector General novels and stories of James White occupy a special niche in the literature of science fiction—tales that show a diversity of species from all over the Galaxy interacting in one location—the sf saloon story is arguably the best example of what I mean. Sector General is a giant hospital in deep space, and the problems of its medical staff and patients form the basis of the often funny stories, which can be found in books like Hospital Station (1962), Major Operation (1971), and Monsters And Medics (1977). Among his notable non-series novels are All Judgement Fled (1968) and the memorable Lifeboat (1972).*

*"Christmas Treason" was the cover story of The Magazine Of Fantasy And Science Fiction at Christmas-time 1961 (the January issue was on the stands well before the cover date), and I well remember the added joy it brought to the holiday season thirty years ago.*

Richard sat on the woolly rug beside his brother's cot and watched the gang arrive one by one.

Liam came first wearing a thick sweater over paja-

mas too tight for him—his parents didn't have central heating. Then Mub, whose folks did not need it, in a nightie. When Greg arrived he fell over a truck belonging to Buster, because he was coming from the daytime, and the moonlight coming into the room was too dim for him to see properly. The noise he made did not disturb the sleeping grownups, but Buster got excited and started rattling the bars of his cot and had to be shushed. Loo arrived last, with one of her long, funny dresses on, and stood blinking for a while, then sat on the side of Richard's bed with the others.

Now the meeting could begin.

For some reason Richard felt worried even though the Investigation was going fine, and he hoped this was just a sign that he was growing up. His Daddy and the other big people worried nearly all the time. Richard was six.

"Before hearing your reports," he began formally, "we will have the Minutes of the last—"

"Do we *hafta* . . . ?" whispered Liam angrily. Beside him Greg said a lot of nonsense words, louder than a whisper, which meant the same thing. Mub, Loo and his three-year-old brother merely radiated impatience.

"*Quiet!*" Richard whispered, then went on silently, "There has got to be Minutes, that book of my Daddy's says so. And talk without making a noise, I can hear you just as well. . . ."

That was his only talent, Richard thought enviously. Compared with the things the others could do it wasn't much. He wasn't able to go to Loo's place, with its funny shed that had no sides and just a turned up roof, or play pirates on the boat Liam's Daddy had given him. There was a big hole in the boat and the engine had been taken out, but there was rope and nets and bits of iron in it, and sometimes the waves came so close it seemed to be floating. Some of the

gang were frightened when the big waves turned white and rushed at them along the sand, but *he* wouldn't have been scared if he had been able to go there. Nor had he been to Mub's place, which was noisy and crowded and not very nice, or climbed the trees beside Greg's farm.

Richard couldn't go *anywhere* unless a grown-up took him in a train or a car or something. Whereas if the others wanted to go somewhere they just went—even Buster could do it now. All he could do was listen and watch through their minds when they were playing and, if one of them wanted to say something complicated to the others, he would take what they were thinking and repeat it so everybody could hear it. And it was only his friends' minds he could get into—if only he could see what *Daddy* was thinking!

He was the oldest and the leader of the gang, but by itself that wasn't much fun. . . .

"I want my train set!" Greg broke in impatiently. A bright but indistinct picture of the promised model railway filled Richard's mind, to be overlaid rapidly by pictures of Mub's dolly, Loo's blackboard, Liam's cowboy suit and Buster's machine-gun. His head felt like bursting.

"Stop thinking so loud!" Richard ordered sharply. "You'll get them, you'll all get them. We were promised."

"I know, but . . ." began Greg.

". . . How?" ended the others, in unison.

"That's what the Investigation is for, to find out," Richard replied crossly. "And we'll never find out if you keep rushing things. Quiet, gang, and listen!"

The room was already silent and then even the thinking noises died down. Richard began to speak in a whisper—he had found that talking while he was thinking kept his mind from wandering onto something else. And besides, he had learned some new

grown-up words and wanted to impress the gang with them.

He said, "Two weeks ago Daddy asked Buster and me what we wanted for Christmas and told us about Santa. Santa Claus will bring you anything you want. Or any two things, or even three things, within reason, my Daddy says. Buster doesn't remember last Christmas, but the rest of us do and that's the way it happens. You hang up your stocking and in the morning there's sweets and apples and things in it, and the *big* stuff you asked for is on the bed. But the grown-ups don't seem to know for sure how they got there . . ."

"S-sleigh and reindeer," Greg whispered excitedly.

Richard shook his head. "None of the grown-ups can say how exactly it happens, they just tell us that Santa will come all right, that we'll get our toys in time and not to worry about it. But we can't help worrying about it. That's why we're having an Investigation to find out what really happens.

"We can't see how one man, even when he has a sleigh and magic reindeer that fly through the air, can bring everybody their toys all in one night . . ." Richard took a deep breath and got ready to use his new, grown-up words. "Delivering all that stuff during the course of a single night is a logistical impossibility."

Buster, Mub and Greg looked impressed. Loo thought primly, "Richard is showing off," and Liam said, "I think he's got a jet."

Feeling annoyed at the mixed reception to his big words, Richard was getting ready to whisper "Yah, Slanty-Eyes!" at Loo when he thought better of it and said instead, "Jets make a noise and we'd remember if we heard one last Christmas. But what we're supposed to do in an Investigation is get the facts and then find the answer—" he glared at Loo—"by a process of deductive reasoning."

Loo didn't say or think a word.

"All right then," Richard went on briskly, "this is what we know . . ."

His name was Santa Claus. Description: a man, big even for a grown-up, fresh complexion, blue eyes, white hair and beard. He dressed in a red cap, coat and trousers, all trimmed with white fur, also black shiny belt and knee-boots. Careful questioning of grown-ups showed that they were all in agreement about his appearance, although none of them had admitted to actually seeing him. Liam's Daddy had been questioned closely on this point and had said that he knew because Liam's Grandad had told *him*. It was also generally agreed that he lived somewhere at the North Pole in a secret cavern under the ice. The cavern was said to contain his toy workshops and storage warehouses.

They knew quite a lot about Santa. The major gap in their knowledge was his methods of distribution. On Christmas Eve, did he have to shoot back and forth to the North Pole when he needed his sleigh refilled? If so it was a very chancy way of doing things and the gang had good cause to be worried. They didn't want any hitches on Christmas Eve, like toys coming late or getting mixed up. If anything they wanted them to come early.

Two weeks ago Richard had seen his mother packing some of his old toys in a box. She had told him that they were going to the orphans because Santa never came to orphans.

The gang had to be *sure* everything would be all right. Imagine wakening on Christmas morning to find you were an *orphan*!

" . . . We can't get any more information at this end," Richard continued, "so we have to find the secret cavern and then see how he sends the stuff out. That was your last assignment, gang, and I'll take your reports now.

"You first, Mub."

Mub shook her head, she had nothing to report. But there was a background picture of her Daddy's face looking angry and shiny and sort of loose, and a smack from her Daddy's large, pink-palmed hand which had hurt her dignity much more than her bottom. Sometimes her Daddy would play with her for hours and she could ask him questions all the time, but other times he would come into the house talking funny and bumping into things the way Buster had done when he was just learning to walk, and then he would smack her if she asked questions all the time. Mub didn't know what to make of her Daddy sometimes.

Still without a word she floated up from the bed and drifted to the window. She began staring out at the cold, moonlit desert and the distant buildings where Richard's Daddy worked.

"Loo?" said Richard.

She had nothing to report either.

"Liam."

"I'll wait to last," said Liam smugly. It was plain that he knew something important, but he was thinking about seagulls to stop Richard from seeing what it was.

"All right, Greg then."

"I found where some of the toys are stored," Greg began. He went on to describe a trip with his mother and father into town to places called shops, and two of them had been full of toys. Then when he was home again his father gave him a beating and sent him to bed without his supper . . .

"O-o-oh," said Loo and Mub sympathetically.

This was because, Greg explained, he had seen a dinky little tractor with rubber treads on it that could climb over piles of books and things. When he got home he thought about it a lot, and then thought that

he would try reaching for it the way they all did when they were somewhere and had left things they wanted to play with somewhere else. His Daddy had found him playing with it and smacked him, four times with his pants down, and told him it was wrong to take things that didn't belong to him and that the tractor was going right back to the shop.

But the beating had only hurt him for a short time and he was nearly asleep when his mother came and gave him a hug and three big chocolates with cream in the middle. He had just finished eating them when his father brought in some more . . .

"O-h-h," said Loo and Mub, enviously.

"Feeties for *me*?" asked Buster, aloud. When excited he was apt to slip back into baby talk. Greg whispered "Night"—a nonsense word he used when he was thinking "No"—and added silently, "I ate them all."

"Getting back to the Investigation," Richard said firmly, "Dad took Buster and me to a shop the day before yesterday. I've been to town before but this time I was able to ask questions, and this is the way they work. Everybody doesn't always know exactly what they want for Christmas, so the stores are meant to show what toys Santa has in stock so they'll know what to ask for. But the toys in the shops can't be touched until Christmas, just like the ones at the North Pole. Daddy said so, and when we were talking to Santa he said the same thing . . ."

"*Santa!!!*"

A little awkwardly Richard went on, "Yes, Buster and I spoke to Santa. We . . . I asked him about his sleigh and reindeer, and then about what seemed to us to be a logistically insoluble problem of supply and distribution. When we were asking him he kept looking at Daddy and Daddy kept looking up in the air,

and that was when we saw his beard was held on with elastic.

"When we told him about this," Richard continued, "he said we were very bright youngsters and he had to admit that he was only one of Santa's deputies in disguise, sent to say Merry Christmas to all the boys and girls because Santa didn't even tell *him* how he worked the trick, it was a Top Secret, but he did know that Santa had lots of computers and things and that the old boy believed in keeping right up to date science-wise. So we didn't have to worry about our toys coming, all that would be taken care of, he said.

"He was a very nice man," Richard concluded, "and didn't mind when we spotted his disguise and asked all the questions. He even gave us a couple of small presents on account."

As he finished Richard couldn't help wondering if that deputy had told everything he knew—he had looked very uncomfortable during some of the questions. Richard thought that it was a great pity that he couldn't listen to what everybody was thinking instead of just the kids in his gang. If only they knew where that secret cavern was.

"I know," said Liam suddenly. "I found it."

Everybody was asking questions at once then, and they were talking instead of just thinking. Where was it and had he seen Santa and was my train-set there and what were the toys like . . . ? In his mind Richard thundered, "Quiet! You'll wake my Daddy! And I'll ask the questions." To Liam he said, "That's great! How did you find it?"

One of Liam's abilities—one shared by Greg and Buster, and to a lesser degree by the girls—was of thinking about a place he would like to be and then going there. Or to be more precise, going to one of the places that were most like the place he wanted to go. He did not think of where so much as what he

wanted—a matter of environment rather than geography. He would decide whether the place should have night, day, rain, sunshine, snow, trees, grass or sand and then think about the fine details. When his mental picture was complete he would go there, or they all—with the exception of Richard—would go there. Liam and Greg had found lots of lovely places in this way, which the gang used when they grew tired of playing in each other's backyards, because once they went to a place they always knew how to go back to it.

This time Liam had been trying for ice caverns with toys and reindeer stalls in them and had got nowhere at all. Apparently no such place existed. Then he started asking himself what would a place look like if it had to make and store things, and maybe had to send them out to people fast. The answer was machinery. It mightn't be as noisy or dirty as the factory his Daddy had taken him to in Derry last summer, but there would have to be machinery.

But there might not be toys—they might not have been made or arrived yet. And if, as Richard had suggested, reindeer and sleighs were no longer in use, then they were out of the picture as well. And the ice cavern, now, that would be a cold place for Santa to work and if he turned on a heater the walls would melt, so the cavern might not be made of ice. What he was left with was a large underground factory or storehouse either at or somewhere near the North Pole.

It wasn't a very good description of the place he was looking for, but he found it.

In Liam's mind was the memory of a vast, echoing corridor so big it looked like a street. It was clean and brightly lit and empty. There was a sort of crane running along the roof with grabs hanging down, a bit like the ones he had seen lifting coal at the docks only these were painted red and yellow, and on both sides

of the corridor stood a line of tall, splendid, unmistakable shapes. Rockets.

*Rockets*, thought Richard excitedly: *that was the answer, all right!* Rockets were faster than anything, although he didn't quite see how the toys would be delivered. Still they would find that out easily now that they knew where the secret cavern was.

"Did you look inside them for toys?" Greg broke in, just ahead of the others asking the same question.

Liam had. Most of the rockets were filled with machinery and the nose had sort of sparkly stuff in it. All the ones he had looked at were the same and he had grown tired of floating about among the noses of the rockets and gone exploring instead. At the other end of the corridor there was a big notice with funny writing on it. He was standing in front of it when two grown-ups with guns started running at him and yelling nonsense words. He got scared and left.

When Liam finished, the girls began congratulating him and the hole in the chest of his sweater grew bigger. Then Greg tried to cut him down to size again by stating, "They weren't nonsense words. What the guards yelled at you, I mean. If you could remember better how they sounded I could tell you what they said . . ."

Just when things were getting exciting, Richard thought impatiently, another argument was going to start about what were nonsense words and what weren't. Buster, Liam and himself could make themselves understood to each other whether they were speaking or thinking, but when any of the others spoke aloud it was just nonsense. And they said the same thing about words Richard, Liam and Buster spoke aloud. But the funny thing was that Loo, Mub and Greg couldn't understand what each other said, either.

Richard had an idea that this was because they lived in different places, like in the pictures he had studied

in his Daddy's *National Geographic* magazines. He had tracked down Liam's place from some of those pictures—Liam lived in a fishing village on the North Irish coast. Why they spoke a funny, but recognizable, form of American there Richard didn't know. Loo and Mub were harder to pin down; there were a couple of places where the people had slanty eyes or had dark brown skin and black curly hair. Greg was the hardest because he didn't have any special skin or hair or eyes. His folks wore furry hats in winter, but that wasn't much to go on . . .

"What do we do now, Richard?" Liam broke in. "Keep thinking about the cavern, huh? Not your Daddy's old books."

For a moment Richard thought into himself, then he opened his mind and asked, "How much time have you all got?"

Mub said it was near her dinner-time. Greg had just finished breakfast and was supposed to be playing in the shed for the next three or four hours. Loo's time was about the same as Greg's. Liam thought it was nearly breakfast time, but his mother didn't mind if he stayed in bed these cold mornings. And Buster, like Richard, had practically the whole of the night to play around in.

"Right," he said briskly when all the reports were in. "It looks like the cavern Liam found isn't the right one—the rockets don't have toys in them. Maybe it's a place for sending toys out, but they haven't arrived from Santa's workshop yet. That workshop is the place we're looking for, and it shouldn't be hard to find now that we know the sort of place to look for—an underground place with rockets."

His thoughts became authoritative as he went on. "You've got to find these underground places and see what goes on in them. We can't be sure of anything we've been told about them, so there might be a lot

of secret caverns. When you find one try not to let anybody see you, look around for toys and see if you can get to the office of the man in charge of the place. If it's Santa or he looks like a nice man, ask him questions. And remember to say please and thank you. If he's not a nice man, or if there's nobody there, try to find out things whatever way you can. Everyone understand?"

Everybody thought, "Yes."

"Okay then. Greg will go to the cavern Liam found, because he can understand what the people say there. Liam and Buster will look for caverns on their own. But remember, once you see that a place doesn't have toys in it, leave and look somewhere else. Don't waste time. Mub and Loo will stay here and be ready to help if you need them, they can't go to new places as easily as you men can."

Richard's mouth felt suddenly dry. He ended, "All right, take off."

Buster flicked out of sight in the middle of a "Wheee-e-e" of excitement. Liam held back for a moment thinking, "But why do they have guards in the caverns?" To which Greg replied, "Maybe to protect the toys against juvenile delinquents. I don't know what they are exactly, but my Daddy says they steal and break things, and if I had kept that tractor I took from the shop I would grow up to be one." Then Liam and Greg quietly disappeared. Loo and Mub began gathering up Buster's teddybear and toys. They floated into Buster's cot with them and started to play houses.

Richard got into bed and lay back on his elbows. Buster was the member of the gang most likely to get into trouble so he listened in for him first. But his brother was in a place where each rocket was held out level by a little crane instead of standing straight up. The sound of voices and footsteps echoed about the

place in a spooky fashion, but his brother had not been spotted. Buster reported that he had looked into the noses of the rockets and they were filled with a lot of junk and some stuff which sparkled and frightened him away.

The stuff didn't sparkle really, of course, but Buster had a talent for looking through things—like brick walls and engine casings—and when he looked into the rocket nose in that way the stuff sparkled. Like the electric wiring at home, he thought, only worse. There were no toys or any sign of Santa, so he was going to try some other place. Richard switched to Greg.

Greg was in the cavern originally found by Liam. Two of the guards were still talking about seeing a boy in pajamas. Greg was going to look around some more and then try another place. Liam's report was much the same, right down to the stuff in the rocket noses which made him afraid to go too close. Richard stopped listening to them and began thinking to himself.

Why had the caverns guards in them? To protect the toys against damage or theft, as Greg had suggested? But where were the toys? The answer to that question was, some of them were in the shops . . .

A bit of conversation between his mother and father, overheard yesterday when they were in one of the shops, popped suddenly into his mind. Richard hadn't known exactly what was going on because he had been watching to see that Buster didn't knock over anything. Daddy had asked his mother if she would like something—beads or a shiny brooch or something—for Christmas. Mummy had said, "Oh John, it's lovely but . . ." Then a man from behind the counter had come up to Daddy, said a few words and gone away again. Daddy had said, "Okay." Then Mummy had said, "But John, are you sure you can

afford it? It's robbery, sheer robbery! These store-keepers are robbers at Christmas time!"

Guards all over the place, Greg's theory, and store-keepers who were robbers at Christmas time. It was beginning to make sense, but Richard was very worried by the picture that was forming.

Loo and Mub had the cot pillow and the teddybear floating in the air above the cot, with Buster's broken truck doing a figure-of-eight between them. But they were being careful not to make a noise so Richard did not say anything. He began listening in for the others again.

Buster had found another cavern, so had Liam. Greg had gone through three more—they had all been small places and plainly not what the gang was looking for. All reported rockets with the same puzzling load, no sign of toys and no Santa. And so it went on. Richard's eyes began to feel heavy and he had to sit on the edge of the bed again to keep from falling asleep.

Mub was lying in Buster's cot being a sick Mummy and Loo was kneeling beside her being the Nurse. At the same time they had taken the truck apart and now a long procession of parts was in orbit around the pillow and teddybear. Richard knew they would put the truck together again before they went home, and probably fix it, too. He wished that he could do something useful like that, and he began to wonder if Loo could move people, too.

When he mentioned the idea to her she stopped being a Nurse long enough to do some experiments. Richard tried as hard as he could to stay sitting on the edge of his bed, but Loo forced him to lie flat on his back. It was as if a big, soft cushion was pushing against his arms and chest. When he tried to prop his elbows behind him, other cushions pushed his arms out straight. After he had been forced to lie flat three

times, Loo told him she wanted to go back to playing Nurse. She didn't like this other game because it made her head hurt.

Richard went back to listening to the searchers again.

Buster was working on his fourth cavern, Liam and Greg on their seventh and ninth respectively. The sudden speeding up of the search was explained by the fact that they no longer walked from place to place inside the caverns, they just *went*. Tired legs, Richard discovered, had been the reason for them all thinking of this time-saving idea. It seemed to get the guards all excited, though. Everywhere the gang went there were guards who got excited—it was hard to stay hidden with so many guards about—but they had not stayed anywhere long enough to be caught. They had found lots of rockets but no sign of a toy workshop, or Santa.

Richard was now pretty sure that the guards were soldiers. In some of the caverns they wore dark green uniforms with black belts and red things on their shoulders, and only Greg could understand the nonsense words they said. In another place, the cavern Liam had searched where you could hear planes taking off, they'd had blue-gray uniforms with shiny buttons and rings on their sleeves and Liam had been able to understand them. Then in a lot of other caverns they had been dressed like that picture of Daddy downstairs, taken when he had been working in a place called Korea.

But where was *Santa*?

During the next three hours the search still failed to reveal his whereabouts. Mub went home for her breakfast and Loo for her dinner, both with orders to come back tomorrow night or sooner if Richard called them. Liam had another two hours before his mother

expected him out of bed. Greg had to break off for dinner.

But he was back to searching caverns again within half an hour, and it was then that Richard noticed something funny about the reports that were coming back. It was as if he was seeing the same caverns twice—the same red-painted cranes, the same groupings of rockets, even the same guards' faces. The only explanation he could think of was that caverns were being searched which had been searched before.

Quickly he told the gang of his suspicions and opened his mind to receive and relay. This meant that Buster, Greg and Liam knew everything that was in each other's minds having to do with the search, including the total number of caverns found up to that time together with their identifying characteristics. Knowing this they would no longer be in danger of going over ground already searched by another member of the gang. Richard then told them to go looking for new caverns.

They tried, and couldn't find one.

Altogether they had uncovered forty-seven of them, from *big* underground places with hundreds of rockets in them down to small places with just a few. And now it seemed plain that this was all the caverns there were, and there was *still* no trace of Santa Claus.

"We've missed something, gang," Richard told them worriedly. "You've got to go back to the biggest caverns again and look around some more. This time ask questions—"

"B-but the guards run at you and yell," Greg broke in. "They're not nice men."

"No," Liam joined in, "they're scary."

Buster said, "I'm hungry."

Richard ignored him and said, "Search the big caverns again. Look for important places, places where there are lots of guards. Find the boss and ask *him*

questions. And don't forget to say please and thank you. Grown-ups will give you practically anything if you say please. . . ."

For a long time after that nothing happened. Richard kept most of his attention on Buster, because his brother had a tendency to forget what he was looking for if anything interesting turned up. Buster was becoming very hungry and a little bored.

His next contact with Liam showed the other hiding behind a large metal cabinet and looking out at a big room. Three walls of the room were covered from floor to ceiling with other cabinets, some of which made clicking, whirring noises and had colored lights on them. The room was empty now except for a guard at the door, but it had not always been that way. In Liam's mind Richard could see the memory of two men in the room who had talked and then left again before Liam could ask them questions. They had been wearing blue-gray uniforms and one of them had had gold stuff on his cap. Liam had remembered every word they said, even the long ones which he didn't understand.

The cabinets with the flashing lights on them were called a Director-Computer, and it worked out speeds and Tradge Ectories so that every rocket in this cavern, and in about twenty others just like it, would be sent to the spot it was meant to go and hit it right on the button. It would tell hundreds and hundreds of rockets where to go, and it would send them off as soon as there was a blip. Liam didn't know what a blip was, however. Did Richard?

"No," said Richard impatiently. "Why didn't you ask one of the guards?"

Because the man with the gold stuff on his cap had told the guard that the situation was getting worse, that there were reports from all over of bases being Infil Trated, and that some sort of Halloo Sinatory

weapon was being used because the guards had insisted that the saboteurs were not adults. He had said trust them to play a dirty trick like this just before Christmas, and he had told the guard to kill any unauthorized personnel trying to enter the computer room on sight. Liam didn't know what an unauthorized personnel was, but he thought it might mean him. And anyway, he was hungry and his mother would be expecting him down from bed soon and he wanted to go home.

"Oh, all right," said Richard.

*Maybe it was a sleigh and reindeer he used in Daddy's young days, he thought excitedly, but now it is rockets. And computers to tell them where to go, just like the deputy Santa told us!*

But why were the guards being told to kill people? Even unauthorized personnel—which sounded like a very nasty sort of people, like juvenile delinquents maybe. Who was pulling what dirty trick just before Christmas? And where were the toys? In short, who was lousing up his and everyone else's Christmas?

The answer was becoming clearer in Richard's mind, and it made him feel mad enough to hit somebody. He thought of contacting Greg, then decided that he should try to find out if he could fix things instead of just finding out more about what had gone wrong. So he called up Loo and Mub, linked them to each other through his mind, and spoke:

"Loo, do you know the catapult Greg keeps under his mattress? Can you send it here without having to go to Greg's place to look for it?"

The grubby, well-used weapon was lying on Richard's bed.

"Good," he said. "Now can you send it b—"

The catapult was gone.

Loo wasn't doing anything special just then and

wouldn't have minded continuing with the game. But it wasn't a game to Richard, it was a test.

"Mub, can you do the same?"

Mub's Daddy was at work and her mother was baking. Mub was waiting to lick the spoon with the icing sugar on it. A little absently she replied, "Yes, Richard."

"Does it make your heads tired?" he asked anxiously.

Apparently it didn't. The girls explained that it was hard to make people, or pussycats, or goldfish move because living things had minds which kind of pushed back, but dead things didn't have anything to push back with and could be moved easily. Richard told them thanks, broke away, then made contact with Greg.

Through Greg's eyes and mind he saw a large desk and two men in dark green uniforms behind it—one standing behind the other, an older and bigger man who was sitting down. Greg was in a chair beside the desk and only a few feet away from the bigger man.

"Your name is Gregor Ivanovitch Krejinski," said the big man, smiling. He was a nice big man, a little like Greg's Daddy, with dark gray hair and lines at the corners of his eyes. He looked like he was scared of Greg but was trying to be nice anyway. Greg, and through him the watching Richard, wondered why he should be scared.

"And you say your parents have a farm not far from a town," the big man went on gently. "But there are no farms or towns such as you describe within three hundred miles of here. What do you say to that, Little Gregor?"

"Now suppose you tell me how you got here, eh?"

That was a difficult question. Greg and the other members of the gang didn't know how they got to places, they just went.

"I just . . . came, sir," said Greg.

The man who was standing lifted his cap and rubbed his forehead, which was sweating. In a low voice he spoke to the big man about other launching bases which had been similarly penetrated. He said that relations with the other side had been almost friendly this past year or so, but it was now obvious that they had been lulled into a sense of false security. In his opinion they were being attacked by a brand new psychological weapon and all firing officers should be ready with their finger on the big red button ready for the first blip. The big man frowned at him and he stopped talking.

"Well, now," the big man resumed to Greg, "if you can't say how you came, can you tell me why, Gregor?"

The big man was sweating now, too.

"To find Santa Claus," said Greg.

The other man began to laugh in a funny way until the big man shushed him and told him to phone the Colonel, and told him what to say. In the big man's opinion the boy himself was not a threat but the circumstances of his appearance here were cause for the gravest concern. He therefore suggested that the base be prepared for a full emergency launch and that the Colonel use his influence to urge that all other bases be similarly prepared. He did not yet know what tactic was being used against them, but he would continue with the interrogation.

"Now, son," he said, returning to Greg, "I can't tell you how to find Santa Claus exactly, but maybe we could do a trade. You tell me what you know and I'll tell you what I know."

Richard thought the big man was very nice and he told Greg to find out all he could from him, then he broke away. It was time he checked on Buster again.

His brother was just on the point of revealing himself to a man sitting in a small room with lots of col-

ored lights around the walls. There was a big glass screen on one wall with a white line going round and round on it, and the man was bent forward in his chair, holding his knees tightly with his hands. He was chewing.

"Feeties . . . ?" asked Buster hopefully.

The man swung round. One hand went to the gun at his belt and the other shot out to stop with one finger on a big red button on his panel, but he didn't push it. He stared at Buster with his face white and shiny and his mouth open. There was a little piece of chewing gum showing on his teeth.

Buster was disappointed; he had thought the man might have been eating cakes of toffee. Chewing gum wasn't much good when you were *hungry*. Still, maybe if he was polite the man might give him some anyway, and even tell him where Santa Claus was.

"How do'oo doe," he said carefully.

"F-fine thanks," said the man, and shook his head. He took his finger off the big red button and pushed another one. He began talking to somebody:

"Unauthorized person in the Firing . . . No, no, I don't have to push the button . . . I know the orders, dammit, but this is a kid! About three, w-wearing pajamas. . . ."

A few minutes later two men ran in. One was thin and young and he told the man at the panel to keep his blasted eyes on the screen in case there was a blip instead of gawking at the kid. The other one was big and broad and very like the man who had asked Greg questions—except he had on a tie instead of a high, tight collar. The second man looked at Buster for a long time, then got down on one knee.

"What are you doing here, sonny?" he said in a funny voice.

"Looking for Santa," said Buster, looking at the man's pockets. They looked empty, not even a hanky

in them. Then, on Richard's prompting, he added, "What's a . . . a blip?"

The man who was standing began to speak rapidly. He said that this was some sort of diversion, that guards at bases all over had been reporting kids, that the other side was working up to some sort of sneak punch. And just when everybody thought relations were improving, too. Maybe this wasn't a kid, maybe this was a child impersonator . . .

"Impersonating a three-year-old?" asked the big man, straightening up again.

All the talk had not helped Richard much and he was getting impatient. He thought for a minute, then made Buster say, "What's a blip . . . *please!*"

The big man went to the one who was sitting in front of the screen. They whispered together, then he walked toward Buster.

"Maybe we should T-I-E his H-A-N-D-S," said the thin man.

In a quiet voice the big man said, "Contact the General. Tell him that until further notice I consider it advisable that all launching bases be placed in Condition Red. Meanwhile I'll see what I can find out. And call Doc, we might as well check on your child impersonation theory."

He turned away from the now open locker with a candy bar in his hand, stripping off the wrapping as he added, "Don't they teach you psychology these days?" And to Buster he said, "A blip is a teeny white mark on a screen like that man is watching."

Buster's mind was so full of thinking about the candy bar that it was hard for Richard to make him ask the proper questions. *Ask him what makes a blip?* he thought furiously at his brother—why were the minds of grown-ups impossible to get into!—and eventually he got through.

"A rocket going up," said the big man; then added crossly, "This is ridiculous!"

"What makes a rocket go up?" prompted Richard.

The man who was watching for blips was holding his knees tightly again. Nobody was talking to him but he said, "One way is to push a big red button . . ." His voice sounded very hoarse.

Watching and listening through his brother's mind Richard decided that he had heard and seen enough. For some time he had been worried about the safety of Greg and Liam and Buster—all the talk of shooting, and the way the guards looked so cross at just a few children who weren't doing any harm. Richard had seen people get shot lots of times on television, and while he hadn't thought much about what being dead meant, getting shot had looked like a very sore thing. He didn't want it happening to any of his gang, especially now when he was sure that there was no reason to go on with the search.

Santa had hid out somewhere, and if what Richard suspected was true, he couldn't blame him. *Poor Santa*, he thought.

Quickly Richard called off the search. He thought he knew what was going on now, but he wanted to think about it some more before deciding what to do. Almost before he had finished Buster was back in his cot, still working on the candy bar. Richard made his brother give him half of it, then he got into bed himself. But not to sleep.

Mub and Loo had never seen any of the caverns yet so he had to attend to that chore first. Using the data available in the three boys' minds he was able to direct the girls to all forty-seven places with no trouble at all. The girls were seen a couple of times but nothing happened—they were just looking, not asking questions. When he was sure they understood what they had to do Richard let them go home, but told them

to start practicing on rocks and things outside his window. After that he lay on his side and looked out at the moonlit desert.

Small rocks and big boulders began to move about. They arranged themselves into circles and squares and stars, or built themselves into cairns. But mostly they just changed places with each other too fast for Richard to see. Fence posts disappeared leaving the wire sagging but unbroken and bushes rose into the air with the ground undisturbed beneath them and every root intact. After an hour of it Richard told them to stop and asked them if they were *sure* it didn't make their heads tired.

They told him no, that moving dead things was easy.

"But you'll have to work awful fast . . ." Richard began.

Apparently it didn't matter. Just so long as they knew where everything was they could move it just like *that*, and Mub sent a thought of her Daddy snapping his fingers. Relieved, Richard told them to put everything out on the desert back the way it had been and to start getting to know the other places he had told them about. They went off joyfully to mix the gang's business with their own pleasure.

Richard became aware of movements downstairs. It was nearly breakfast time.

Since the early hours of the morning Richard had been sure he knew what had gone wrong with the Christmas business, and the steps the gang must take to put matters right again—or as near right as it was possible to put them. It was a terrific responsibility for a six-year-old, and the trouble was that he hadn't heard the grown-ups' side of it. What he intended doing could get him into bad trouble if his Daddy found out—he might even get beaten. Richard's par-

ents had taught him to respect other people's property.

But his Daddy was usually a bit dopey at breakfast time. Maybe he would be able to ask some questions without his Daddy asking too many back.

"Daddy," he said as he was finishing his cereal, "d'you know all those rockets Santa has in his secret caverns at the North Pole? And the stuff in the nose of them that you're not allowed to go near . . . ?"

His Daddy choked and got cross and began talking to his mother. He said that he would never have taken this out-of-the-way job if he hadn't been sure that Richard's mother, being an ex-schoolteacher, could look after the children's education. But it was quite obvious that she was forcing Richard far too much and he was too young to be told about things like rocket bases. To which his mother replied that his Daddy didn't believe her when she told him that Richard could read the *National Geographic*—and not just pretend to read them—and even an odd whodunit. Sure she had taught him more than a normal six-year-old but that was because he could take it—she wasn't doing a doting mother act, Richard really was an exceptionally bright boy. And *she* hadn't told him about rocket bases, he must have got it from a magazine or something . . .

And so it went on. Richard sighed, thinking that every time he asked a complicated question his mother and father started arguing about him between themselves and ignoring his question completely.

"Daddy," said Richard during a lull, "they're big people's toys, aren't they?"

"Yes!" his father snapped. "But the big people don't want to play with them. In fact, we'd be better off without them!" Then he turned and went back to arguing with their mother. Richard excused himself

and left, thinking at Buster to follow him as soon as he could.

*So the big people don't want their toys*, Richard thought with grim satisfaction. That meant the gang was free to go ahead.

All that day Richard listened in on Loo and Mub. The girls were fast but there was an awful lot to do so he set Greg and Liam to helping them—the boys could move things, too, but not as fast as the girls. But everybody had been awake for so long they began to fall asleep one by one. When it happened to Buster and Richard their mother thought they were taking sick and was worried, but both of them were up as fresh as ever when their father came home so she didn't mention it. And that night there was another meeting of the gang in the bedroom.

"We'll dispense with the Minutes of the last Meeting," Richard began formally, then opened his mind to all of them. Up until then the gang had been acting on orders, although from the things they had been doing they must have guessed what he intended, but now they *knew*. He gave them all the pieces of the puzzle and showed them how it fitted together.

The evasions of their parents, the overflowing toy stores and the computers which could direct a rocket to any spot in the world. A strangely uncomfortable deputy Santa—they must have had some kind of hold over him at the store—and secret caverns guarded by angry soldiers and storekeepers who were robbers. And juvenile delinquents, and a Santa Claus who couldn't be found because he must have run away and hidden himself because he was ashamed to face the children and tell them that all their toys had been stolen.

Obviously the juvenile delinquents had raided Santa's toy caverns and cleaned them out, leaving only big people's toys which the adults themselves no longer

wanted—this explained why Santa's guards were so mad at everybody. Then the stolen toys had been sent to the storekeepers, who were probably in cahoots with the delinquents. It was as simple as that. Santa just would not be coming around this Christmas and nobody would get any toys, unless the gang did something about it . . .

" . . . We're going to see that the children get *something*," Richard went on grimly. "But none of us is going to get what he asked for. There is no way of telling which one of all those hundreds of rockets is meant for any one of us. So we'll just have to take what comes. The only good thing is that we're going to make Christmas come three days early.

"All right, gang, let's get started."

Buster returned to the room where he had been given candy the night before, the room with the man who watched a screen with a white line going round on it. But he stayed hidden this time—he was merely acting as the gang's eyes. Then Mub and Loo, linked to the distant room through Buster's and Richard's minds, began to move the grown-up who sat before the screen. More precisely, they moved his hand and arm in the direction of the big red button.

But the grown-up didn't want to push the button and make blips. He struggled to pull back his hand so hard that Loo complained that it was hurting her head. Then they all got together—Liam, Greg, Buster and the girls—and concentrated. The man's finger started moving toward the button again and he began to shout to somebody on the radio. Then he drew his gun with the other hand and hit his arm with it, knocking it away from the button. He was being very, very naughty.

"Why don't we push the button," Greg asked suddenly, "instead of making the grown-up push it?"

Richard felt his face going red, *he* should have

thought of that. Within a second the big red button drove down into the bottom of its socket.

The Early Warning systems were efficient on both sides. Within three minutes all forty-seven missile bases had launched or were launching their rockets. It was an automatic process, there were no last-minute checks, the missiles being maintained in constant readiness. In those same three minutes orders went out to missile-carrying submarines to take up previously assigned positions off enemy coasts, and giant bombers screamed away from airfields which expected total annihilation before the last one was off. Like two vast, opposing shoals of fish the missiles slid spaceward, their numbers thinned—but only slightly—by the suicidal frenzy of the anti-missiles. The shoals dispersed and curved groundward again, dead on course, to strike dead on target. The casualty and damage reports began coming in.

Seventeen people injured by falling plaster or masonry; impact craters twenty feet across in the middle of city streets; tens of thousands of dollars and pounds and rubles worth of damage. It was not long before urgent messages were going out to recall the subs and bombers. Before anything else was tried the authorities had to know why every missile that had been sent against the enemy, and every missile that the enemy had sent against them, had failed to explode.

They also wanted to know who or what had been making rocket base personnel on both sides do and see things which they didn't want to. And why an examination of the dud missiles revealed the shattered and fused remains of train sets and toy sixshooters, and if this could have any possible connection with the robberies of large toy stores in such widely separate places as Salt Lake City, Irkutsk, Londonderry

and Tokyo. Tentatively at first both sides came together to compare notes, their intense curiosity to know what the blazes had *happened* being one thing they had in common. Later, of course, they discovered other things . . .

That year Christmas came with the beginning of a lasting peace on Earth, although six members of a young and very talented gang did not appreciate this. The toys which they had put in the noses of the rockets to replace the sparkly stuff—which they had dumped in the ocean because the grown-ups didn't want it—had failed to reach them. They had been worrying in case they had done something very wrong or been very bad. They couldn't have been *very* bad, however, because Santa came just as they had been told he would, on a sleigh with reindeer.

They were asleep at the time, though, and didn't see it.



# SEVEN-DAY TERROR

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BY R. A. LAFFERTY (1914- )

IF  
MARCH

*The winner of a 1973 Hugo Award for "Eurema's Dam," R. A. Lafferty is one of science fiction's premier humorists and story-tellers. Although he has published some two dozen books of sf and fantasy his work is shamefully little-known to the current generation of readers. His collection Nine Hundred Grandmothers will surely be regarded as a classic in the field.*

*That collection contains "Seven-Day Terror," a typically Laffertyesque turn on the fabulous invention story.*

"Is there anything you want to make disappear?" Clarence Willoughby asked his mother.

"A sink full of dishes is all I can think of. How will you do it?"

"I just built a disappearer. All you do is cut the other end out of a beer can. Then you take two pieces of red cardboard with peepholes in the middle and fit them in the ends. You look through the peepholes and blink. Whatever you look at will disappear."

"Oh."

"But I don't know if I can make them come back.

We'd better try it on something else. Dishes cost money."

As always, Myra Willoughby had to admire the wisdom of her nine-year-old son. She would not have had such foresight herself. He always did. "You can try it on Blanche Manners' cat outside there. Nobody will care if it disappears except Blanche Manners."

"All right."

He put the disappearer to his eye and blinked. The cat disappeared from the sidewalk outside.

His mother was interested. "I wonder how it works. Do you know how it works?"

"Yes. You take a beer can with both ends cut out and put in two pieces of cardboard. Then you blink."

"Never mind. Take it outside and play with it. You hadn't better make anything disappear in here till I think about this."

But when he had gone his mother was oddly disturbed.

"I wonder if I have a precocious child. Why, there's lots of grown people who wouldn't know how to make a disappearer that would work. I wonder if Blanche Manners will miss her cat very much?"

Clarence went down to the Plugged Nickel, a pot house on the corner.

"Do you have anything you want to make disappear, Nokomis?"

"Only my paunch."

"If I make it disappear it'll leave a hole in you and you'll bleed to death."

"That's right, I would. Why don't you try it on the fireplug outside?"

This in a way was one of the happiest afternoons ever in the neighborhood. The children came from blocks around to play in the flooded streets and gutters, and if some of them drowned (and we don't say that they *did* drown) in the flood (and brother! it was

a flood), why, you have to expect things like that. The fire engines (whoever heard of calling fire engines to put out a flood?) were apparatus-deep in the water. The policemen and ambulance men wandered around wet and bewildered.

"Resuscitator, resuscitator, anybody wanna resuscitator," chanted Clarissa Willoughby.

"Oh, shut up," said the ambulance attendants.

Nokomis, the bar man in the Plugged Nickel, called Clarence aside.

"I don't believe, just for the moment, I'd tell anyone what happened to that fireplug," he said.

"I won't tell if you won't tell," said Clarence.

Officer Comstock was suspicious. "There's only seven possible explanations: one of the seven Willoughby kids did it. I dunno how. It'd take a bulldozer to do it, and then there'd be something left of the plug. But however they did it, one of them did it."

Officer Comstock had a talent for getting near the truth of dark matters. This is why he was walking a beat out here in the boondocks instead of sitting in a chair downtown.

"Clarissa!" said Officer Comstock in a voice like thunder.

"Resuscitator, resuscitator, anybody wanna resuscitator?" chanted Clarissa.

"Do you know what happened to that fireplug?" asked Officer C.

"I have an uncanny suspicion. As yet it is no more than that. When I am better informed I will advise you."

Clarissa was eight years old and much given to uncanny suspicions.

"Clementine, Harold, Corinne, Jimmy, Cyril," he asked the five younger Willoughby children. "Do you know what happened to that fireplug?"

"There was a man around yesterday. I bet he took it," said Clementine.

"I don't even remember a fireplug there. I think you're making a lot of fuss about nothing," said Harold.

"City Hall's going to hear about this," said Corinne.

"Pretty dommed sure," said Jimmy, "but I won't tell."

"Cyril!" cried Officer Comstock in a terrible voice. Not a terrifying voice, a terrible voice. He felt terrible now.

"Great green bananas," said Cyril, "I'm only three years old. I don't see how it's even my responsibility."

"Clarence," said Officer Comstock.

Clarence gulped.

"Do you know where that fireplug went?"

Clarence brightened. "No, sir. I don't know where it went."

A bunch of smart alics from the water department came out and shut off the water for a few blocks around and put some kind of cap on in place of the fireplug. "This sure is going to be a funny-sounding report," said one of them.

Officer Comstock walked away discouraged. "Don't bother me, Miss Manners," he said. "I don't know where to look for your cat. I don't even know where to look for a fireplug."

"I have an idea," said Clarissa, "that when you find the cat you will find the fireplug in the same place. As yet it is only an idea."

Ozzie Murphy wore a little hat on top of his head. Clarence pointed his weapon and winked. The hat was no longer there, but a little trickle of blood was running down the pate.

"I don't believe I'd play with that any more," said Nokomis.

"Who's playing?" said Clarence. "This is for real."

This was the beginning of the seven-day terror in the heretofore obscure neighborhood. Trees disappeared from the parks; lamp posts were as though they had never been; Wally Waldorf drove home, got out, slammed the door of his car, and there was no car. As George Mullendorf came up the walk to his house his dog Pete ran to meet him and took a flying leap to his arms. The dog left the sidewalk but something happened; the dog was gone and only a bark lingered for a moment in the puzzled air.

But the worst were the fireplugs. The second plug was installed the morning after the disappearance of the first. In eight minutes it was gone and the flood waters returned. Another one was in by twelve o'clock. Within three minutes it had vanished. The next morning fireplug number four was installed.

The water commissioner was there, the city engineer was there, the chief of police was there with a riot squad, the president of the Parent-Teachers Association was there, the president of the university was there, the mayor was there, three gentlemen of the F.B.I., a newsreel photographer, eminent scientists and a crowd of honest citizens.

"Let's see it disappear now," said the city engineer.

"Let's see it disappear now," said the police chief.

"Let's see it disa—it did, didn't it?" said one of the eminent scientists.

And it was gone and everybody was very wet.

"At least I have the picture sequence of the year," said the photographer. But his camera and apparatus disappeared from the midst of them.

"Shut off the water and cap it," said the commissioner. "And don't put in another plug yet. That was the last plug in the warehouse."

"This is too big for me," said the mayor. "I wonder that Tass doesn't have it yet."

"Tass has it," said a little round man. "I am Tass."

"If all of you gentlemen will come into the Plugged Nickel," said Nokomis, "and try one of our new Fire Hydrant Highballs you will all be happier. These are made of good corn whiskey, brown sugar, and hydrant water from this very gutter. You can be the first to drink them."

Business was phenomenal at the Plugged Nickel, for it was in front of its very doors that the fireplugs disappeared in floods of gushing water.

"I know a way we can get rich," said Clarissa several days later to her father, Tom Willoughby. "Everybody says they're going to sell their houses for nothing and move out of the neighborhood. Go get a lot of money and buy them all. Then you can sell them again and get rich."

"I wouldn't buy them for a dollar each. Three of them have disappeared already, and all the families but us have their furniture moved out in their front yards. There might be nothing but vacant lots in the morning."

"Good, then buy the vacant lots. And you can be ready when the houses come back."

"Come back? Are the houses going to come back? Do you know anything about this, young lady?"

"I have a suspicion verging on a certainty. As of now I can say no more."

Three eminent scientists were gathered in an untidy suite that looked as though it belonged to a drunken sultan.

"This transcends the metaphysical. It impinges on the quantum continuum. In some way it obsoletes Boff," said Dr. Velikof Vonk.

"The contingency of the intransigence is the most mystifying aspect," said Arpad Arkabaranan.

"Yes," said Willy McGilly. "Who would have thought that you could do it with a beer can and two

pieces of cardboard? When I was a boy I used an oatmeal box and red crayola."

"I do not always follow you," said Dr. Vonk. "I wish you would speak plainer."

So far no human had been injured or disappeared—except for a little blood on the pate of Ozzie Murphy, on the lobes of Conchita when her gaudy earrings disappeared from her very ears, a clipped finger or so when a house vanished as the first doorknob was touched, a lost toe when a neighborhood boy kicked at a can and the can was not; probably not more than a pint of blood and three or four ounces of flesh all together.

Now, however, Mr. Buckle the grocery man disappeared before witnesses. This was serious.

Some mean-looking investigators from downtown came out to the Willoughbys. The meanest-looking one was the mayor. In happier days he had not been a mean man, but the terror had now reigned for seven days.

"There have been ugly rumors," said one of the mean investigators, "that link certain events to this household. Do any of you know anything about them?"

"I started most of them," said Clarissa. "But I didn't consider them ugly. Cryptic, rather. But if you want to get to the bottom of this just ask me a question."

"Did you make those things disappear?" asked the investigator.

"That isn't the question," said Clarissa.

"Do you know where they have gone?" asked the investigator.

"That isn't the question either," said Clarissa.

"Can you make them come back?"

"Why, of course I can. Anybody can. Can't you?"

"I cannot. If you can, please do so at once."

"I need some stuff. Get me a gold watch and a hammer. Then go down to the drug store and get me this list of chemicals. And I need a yard of black velvet and a pound of rock candy."

"Shall we?" asked one of the investigators.

"Yes," said the mayor. "It's our only hope. Get her anything she wants."

And it was all assembled.

"Why does she get all the attention?" asked Clarence. "I was the one who made all the things disappear. How does she know how to get them back?"

"I knew it!" cried Clarissa with hate. "I knew he was the one that did it. He read in my diary how to make a disappearer. If I was his mother I'd whip him for reading his little sister's diary. That's what happens when things like that fall into irresponsible hands."

She poised the hammer over the mayor's gold watch, now on the floor.

"I have to wait a few seconds. This can't be hurried. It'll be only a little while."

The second hand swept around to the point that was preordained for it before the world began. Clarissa suddenly brought down the hammer with all her force on the beautiful gold watch.

"That's all," she said. "Your troubles are over. See, there is Blanche Manners' cat on the sidewalk just where she was seven days ago."

And the cat was back.

"Now let's go down to the Plugged Nickel and watch the fireplugs come back."

They had only a few minutes to wait. It came from nowhere and clanged into the street like a sign and a witness.

"Now I predict," said Clarissa, "that every single object will return exactly seven days from the time of its disappearance."

The seven-day terror had ended. The objects began to reappear.

"How," asked the mayor, "did you know they would come back in seven days?"

"Because it was a seven-day disappearer that Clarence made. I also know how to make a nine-day, a thirteen-day, a twenty-seven-day, and an eleven-year disappearer. I was going to make a thirteen-year one, but for that you have to color the ends with the blood from a little boy's heart, and Cyril cried every time I tried to make a good cut."

"You really know how to make all of these?"

"Yes. But I shudder if the knowledge should ever come into unauthorized hands."

"I shudder, too, Clarissa. But tell me, why did you want the chemicals?"

"For my chemistry set."

"And the black velvet?"

"For doll dresses."

"And the pound of rock candy?"

"How did you ever get to be mayor of this town if you have to ask questions like that? What do you think I wanted the rock candy for?"

"One last question," said the mayor. "Why did you smash my gold watch with the hammer?"

"Oh," said Clarissa, "that was for dramatic effect."



# KINGS WHO DIE

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BY POUL ANDERSON (1926- )

IF  
MARCH

*A fairly common practice in science fiction magazine publishing was to acquire artwork, including cover art, in batches, sometimes long before stories were available to fill the pages. Editors would then assign writers (or writers would visit their office, see the artwork, and offer to do stories based on them) the task of writing a story to fit a particular piece of cover art. This frequently produced excellent fiction.*

*Poul Anderson wrote "Kings Who Die" around the art that appeared on the cover of the March 1962 issue of If, and it turned out to be an excellent story about combat in space, human-computer interfacing (one of the first stories to address this question), and about why wars get fought in the first place.*

Luckily, Diaz was facing the other way when the missile exploded. It was too far off to blind him permanently, but the retinal burns would have taken a week or more to heal. He saw the glare reflected in his view lenses. As a ground soldier he would have hit the rock and tried to claw himself a hole. But there was no ground here, no up or down, concealment or shelter,

on a slice of spaceship orbiting through the darkness beyond Mars.

Diaz went loose in his armor. Countdown: brow, jaw, neck, shoulders, back, chest, belly . . . No blast came, to slam him against the end of his lifeline and break any bones whose muscles were not relaxed. So it had not been a shaped-charge shell, firing a cone of atomic-powered concussion through space. Or if it was, he had not been caught in the danger zone. As for radiation, he needn't worry much about that. Whatever particles and gamma photons he got at this distance should not be too big a dose for the anti-X in his body to handle the effects.

He was alive.

He drew a breath which was a good deal shakier than the Academy satorist would have approved of. ("If your nerves twitch, cadet-san, then you know yourself alive and they need not twitch. Correct?" To hell with that, except as a technique.) Slowly, he hauled himself in until his boots made magnetic contact and he stood, so to speak, upon his raft.

Then he turned about for a look.

"*Nombre de Dios*," he murmured, a hollow noise in the helmet. Forgotten habit came back, with a moment's recollection of his mother's face. He crossed himself.

Against blackness and a million wintry stars, a gas cloud expanded. It glowed in many soft hues, the center still bright, edges fading into vacuum. Shaped explosions did not behave like that, thought the calculator part of Diaz; this had been a standard fireball type. But the cloud was nonspherical. Hence a ship had been hit. A big ship. But whose?

Most of him stood in wonder. A few years ago he'd spent a furlough at Antarctic Lodge. He and some girl had taken a snowcat out to watch the aurora, thinking it would make a romantic background. But then they

saw the sky and forgot about each other for a long time. There was only the aurora.

The same awesome silence was here, as that incandescence which had been a ship and her crew swelled and vanished into space.

The calculator in his head proceeded with its business. Of those American vessels near the *Argonne* when first contact was made with the enemy, only the *Washington* was sufficiently massive to go out in a blast of yonder size and shape. If that was what had happened, Captain Martin Diaz of the United States Astromilitary Corps was a dead man. The other ships of the line were too distant, traveling on vectors too unlike his own, for their scoutboats to come anywhere close to where he was.

On the other hand, it might well have been a Unasian battlewagon. Diaz had small information on the dispositions of the enemy fleet. He'd had his brain full just directing the torp launchers under his immediate command. If that had indeed been a hostile dreadnaught which got clobbered, surely none but the *Washington* could have delivered the blow, and its boats would be near—

There!

For half a second Diaz was too stiffened by the sight to react. The boat ran black across waning clouds, accelerating on a streak of its own fire. The wings and sharp shape that were needed in atmosphere made him think of a marlin he had once hooked off Florida, blue lightning under the sun. . . . Then a flare was in his hand; he squeezed the igniter and radiance blossomed.

Just an attention-getting device, he thought, and laughed unevenly as he and Bernie Sternthal had done, acting out the standard irreverences of high school students toward the psych course. But Bernie

had left his bones on Ganymede, three years ago, and in this hour Diaz's throat was constricted and his nostrils full of his own stench.

He skyhooked the flare and hunkered in its harsh illumination by his radio transmitter. Clumsy in their gauntlets, his fingers adjusted controls, set the revolving beams on SOS. If he had been noticed, and if it was physically possible to make the velocity changes required, a boat would come for him. The Corps looked after its own.

Presently the flare guttered out. The pyre cloud faded to nothing.

The raft deck was between Diaz and the shrunken sun, but the stars that crowded on every side gave ample soft light. He allowed his gullet, which felt like sandpaper, a suck from his one water flask. Otherwise he had several air bottles, an oxygen reclaim unit and a ridiculously large box of Q rations. His raft was a section of inner plating, torn off when the *Argonne* encountered the ball storm. She was only a pursuit cruiser, unarmored against such weapons. At thirty miles per second, relative, the little steel spheres tossed in her path by some Unasian gun had not left much but junk and corpses. Diaz had found no other survivors. He'd lashed what he could salvage onto this raft, including a shaped torp charge that rocketed him clear of the ruins. This far spaceward, he didn't need screen fields against solar-particle radiation. So he had had a small hope of rescue. Maybe bigger than small, now.

Unless an enemy craft spotted him first.

His scalp crawled with that thought. His right arm, where the thing lay buried which he might use in the event of capture, began to itch.

But no, he told himself, don't be sillier than regulations require. That scoutboat was positively American.

The probability of a hostile vessel being in detection range of his flare and radio—or able to change vectors fast enough—or giving a damn about him in any event—approached so close to zero as to make no difference.

"Wish I'd found our bottle in the wreckage," he said aloud. He was talking to Carl Bailey, who'd helped him smuggle the Scotch aboard at Shepard Field when the fleet was alerted for departure. The steel balls had chewed Carl to pieces, some of which Diaz had seen. "It gripes me not to empty that bottle. On behalf of us both, I mean. Maybe," his voice wandered on, "a million years hence, it'll drift into another planetary system and owl-eyed critters will pick it up in boneless fingers, eh, Carl, and put it in a museum."

He realized what he was doing and snapped his mouth shut. But his mind continued. *The trouble is, those critters won't know about Carl Bailey, who collected antique jazz tapes, and played a rough game of poker, and had a D.S.M. and a gimpy leg from rescuing three boys whose patroller crashed on Venus, and went on the town with Martin Diaz one evening not so long ago when—What did happen that evening, anyhow?*

*He dreamed . . .*

There was a joint down in the Mexican section of San Diego which Diaz remembered was fun. So they caught a giro outside the Hotel Kennedy, where the spacemen were staying—they could afford swank, and felt they owed it to the Corps—and where they had bought their girls dinner. Diaz punched the cantina's name. The autopilot searched its directory and swung the cab onto the Embarcadero-Balboa skyrail.

Sharon sighed and snuggled into the curve of his

arm. "How beautiful," she said. "How nice of you to show me this." He felt she meant a little more than polite banality. The view through the bubble really was great tonight. The city winked and blazed, a god's hoard of jewels, from horizon to horizon. Only in one direction was there anything but light: westward, where the ocean lay aglow. A nearly full moon stood high in the sky. He pointed out a tiny distant glitter on its dark edge.

"Vladimir Base."

"Ugh," said Sharon. "Unasians." She stiffened a trifle.

"Oh, they're decent fellows," Bailey said from the rear seat.

"How do you know?" asked his own date, Naomi, a serious-looking girl and quick on the uptake.

"I've been there a time or two." He shrugged.

"What?" Sharon exclaimed. "When we're at *war*?"

"Why not?" Diaz said. "The Ambassador of United Asia gave a party for our President just yesterday. I watched on the newscreen. Big social event."

"But that's different," Sharon protested. "The war goes on in space, not on Earth and—"

"We don't blow up each other's lunar bases either," Bailey said. "Too close to home. So once in a while we have occasion to, uh, 'parley' is the official word. Actually, the last time I went over—couple years ago now—it was to return a craterbug we'd borrowed and bring some algabligh antibiotic they needed. They poured me full of very excellent vodka."

"I'm surprised you admit this so openly," said Naomi.

"No secret, my dear," purred Diaz in his best grandee manner, twirling an imaginary mustache. "The newscreens simply don't mention it. Wouldn't be popular, I suppose."

"Oh, people wouldn't care, seeing it was the Corps," Sharon said.

"That's right," Naomi smiled. "The Corps can do no wrong."

"Why, thankee kindly." Diaz grinned at Sharon, chucked her under the chin and kissed her. She held back an instant, having met him only this afternoon. But of course she knew what a date with a Corpsman usually meant, and he knew she knew, and she knew he knew, so before long she relaxed and enjoyed it.

The giro stopped those proceedings by descending to the street and rolling three blocks to the cantina. They entered a low, noisy room hung with bullfight posters and dense with smoke. Diaz threw a glance around and wrinkled his nose. "*Sanabiche!*" he muttered. "The tourists have discovered this place."

"Uh-huh," Bailey answered in the same disappointed *sotto voce*. "Loud tunics, lard faces, 3V and a juke wall. But let's have a couple drinks, at least, seeing we're here."

"That's the trouble with being in space two or three years at a time," Diaz said. "You lose track. Well—" They found a booth.

The waiter recognized him, even after so long a lapse, and called the proprietor. The old man bowed nearly to the floor and begged they accept tequila from his private stock. "*No, no, Señor Capitán, conserva el dinero, por favor.*" The girls were delighted. Picturesqueness seemed harder to come by each time Diaz made Earthfall. The evening was off to a good start in spite of everything.

But then someone paid the juke.

The wall came awake with a scrawny blonde fourteen-year-old, the latest fashion in sex queens, wearing a grass skirt and three times life size:

*Bingle-jingle-jungle-bang-POW!*  
*Bingle-jingle-jangle-bang-UGH!*  
*Uh'm uh red-hot Congo gal an' Uh'm lookin' fuh*  
*a pal*  
*Tuh share mah bingle-jingle-bangle-jungle-ugh-*  
*YOW!*

"What did you say?" Sharon called through the saxophones.

"Never mind," Diaz grunted. "They wouldn't've included it in your school Spanish anyway."

"Those things make me almost wish World War Four would start," Naomi said bitterly.

Bailey's mouth tightened. "Don't talk like that," he said. "Wasn't Number Three a close enough call for the race? Without even accomplishing its aims, for either side. I've seen . . . Any war is too big."

Lest they become serious, Diaz said thoughtfully above the racket: "You know, it should be possible to do something about those Kallikak walls. Like, maybe, an oscillator. They've got oscillators these days which'll even goof a solid-state apparatus at close range."

"The FCC wouldn't allow that," Bailey said. "Especially since it'd interfere with local 3V reception."

"That's bad? Besides, you could miniaturize the oscillator so it'd be hard to find. Make it small enough to carry in your pocket. Or even in your body, if you could locate a doctor who'd, uh, perform an illegal operation. I've seen uplousing units no bigger than—"

"You could strew 'em around town," Bailey said, getting interested. "Hide 'em in obscure corners and—"

*"Ugga-wugga-wugga, hugga me, do!"*

"I wish it would stop," Naomi said. "I came here to get to know you, Carl, not that thing."

Bailey sat straight. One hand, lying on the table, shaped a fist. "Why not?" he said.

"Eh?" Diaz asked.

Bailey rose. "Excuse me a minute." He bowed to the girls and made his way through the dancers to the wall control. There he switched the record off.

Silence fell like a meteor. For a moment, voices were stilled too. Then a large tourist came barreling off his bar stool and yelled, "Hey, wha' d'yuh think you're—"

"I'll refund your money, sir," Bailey said mildly. "But the noise bothers the lady I'm with."

"Huh? Hey, who d'yuh think yuh are, you—"

The proprietor came from around the bar. "If the lady weeshes it off," he declared, "off it stays."

"What kinda discrimination is this?" roared the tourist. Several other people growled with him.

Diaz prepared to go help, in case things got rough. But his companion pulled up the sleeve of his mufti tunic. The ID bracelet gleamed into view. "First Lieutenant Carl H. Bailey, United States Astromilitary Corps, at your service," he said; and a circular wave of quietness expanded around him. "Please forgive my action. I'll gladly stand the house a round."

But that wasn't necessary. The tourist fell all over himself apologizing and begged to buy the drinks. Then someone else bought them, and someone after him. Nobody ventured near the booth, where the spacemen obviously wanted privacy. But from time to time, when Diaz glanced out, he got many smiles and a few shy waves. It was almost embarrassing.

"I was afraid for a minute we'd have a fight," he said.

"N-no," Bailey answered. "I've watched our prestige develop exponentially, being stateside while my leg healed. I doubt if there's an American alive who'd lift a finger against a Corpsman these days. But I

admit I was afraid of a scene. That wouldn't've done the name of the Corps any good. As things worked out, though—"

"We came off too bloody well," Diaz finished. "Now there's not even any pseudo life in this place. Let's haul mass. We can catch the transpolar shuttle to Paris if we hurry."

But at that moment the proprietor's friends and relations, who also remembered him, began to arrive. They must have been phoned the great news. Pablo was there, Manuel, Carmen with her castanets, Juan with his guitar, Tio Rico waving a bottle in each enormous fist; and they welcomed Diaz back with embraces, and soon there was song and dancing, and the fiesta ended in the rear courtyard watching the moon set before dawn, and everything was just like the old days, for Señor Capitán Diaz's sake.

That had been a hell of a good furlough. . . .

Another jet splashed fire across the Milky Way. Closer this time, and obviously reducing relative speed.

Diaz croaked out a cheer. He had spent weary hours waiting. The hugeness and aloneness had eaten further into his defenses than he wished to realize. He had begun to understand what some people told him, that it disturbed them to see the stars on a clear mountain night. (Where wind went souging through pines whose bark smelled like vanilla if you laid your head close, and a river flowed cold and loud over stones—oh, Christ, how beautiful Earth was!) He shoved such matters aside and reactivated his transmitter.

The streak winked out and the stars crowded back into his eyes. But that was all right. It meant that the boat had decelerated as much as necessary, and soon there would be a scooter homing on his beam, and water and food and sleep, and a new ship and eventu-

ally certain letters to write. That would be the worst part. But not for months or years yet, not till one side or the other conceded the present phase of the war. Diaz found himself wishing most for a cigarette.

He hadn't seen the boat's hull this time, of course; there had been no rosy cloud to silhouette its blackness. Nor did he see the scooter until it was almost upon him. That jet was very thin, since it need only drive a few hundred pounds of mass on which two spacesuited men sat. They were little more than a highlight and a shadow. Diaz's pulse filled the silence. "Hallo!" he called in his helmet mike. "Hallo, there!"

They didn't answer. The scooter matched velocities a few yards off. One man tossed a line with a luminous bulb at the end. Diaz caught it and made fast. The line was drawn taut. Scooter and raft bumped together and began gently rotating.

Diaz recognized those helmets.

He snatched for a sidearm he didn't have. A Unasian sprang to one side, lifeline unreeling. His companion stayed mounted, a chucker gun cradled in his arms. The sun rose blindingly over the raft edge.

There was nothing to be done. Yet. Diaz fought down a physical nausea of defeat, "raised" his hands and let them hang free. The other man came behind him and deftly wired his wrists together. Both Unasians spent a few minutes inspecting the raft. The man with the gun tuned in on the American band.

"You make very clever salvage, sir," he said.

"Thank you," Diaz whispered, helpless and stunned.

"Come, please." He was lashed to the carrier rack. Weight tugged at him as the scooter accelerated.

They took an hour or more to rendezvous. Diaz had time to adjust his emotions. The first horror passed into numbness; then there was a sneaking relief, that he would get a reasonably comfortable vacation from

war until the next prisoner exchange; and then he remembered the new doctrine, which applied to all commissioned officers whom there had been time to operate on.

*I may never get the chance, he thought frantically. They told me not to waste myself on anything less than a cruiser; my chromosomes and several million dollars spent in training me make me that valuable to the country, at least. I may go straight to Pallas, or wherever their handiest prison base is, in a lousy scoutboat or cargo ship.*

*But I may get a chance to strike a blow that'll hurt. Have I got the guts? I hope so. No, I don't even know if I hope it. This is a cold place to die.*

The feeling passed. Emotional control, drilled into him at the Academy and practiced at every refresher course, took over. It was essentially psychosomatic, a matter of using conditioned reflexes to bring muscles and nerves and glands back toward normal. If the fear symptoms, tension, tachycardia, sweat, decreased salivation and the rest, were alleviated, then fear itself was. Far down under the surface, a four-year-old named Martin woke from nightmare and screamed for his mother, who did not come; but Diaz grew able to ignore him.

The boat became visible, black across star clouds. No, not a boat. A small ship . . . abnormally large jets and light guns, a modified *Panyushkin* . . . what had the enemy been up to in his asteroid shipyards? Some kind of courier vessel, maybe. Recognition signals must be flashing back and forth. The scooter passed smoothly through a lock that closed again behind. Air was pumped in. Diaz went blind as frost condensed on his helmet. Several men assisted him out of the armor. They hadn't quite finished when an

alarm rang, engines droned and weight came back. The ship was starting off at about half a gee.

Short bodies in green uniforms surrounded Diaz. Their immaculate appearance reminded him of his own unshaven filthiness, how much he ached and how sandy his brain felt. "Well," he mumbled, "where's your interrogation officer?"

"You go more high, Captain," answered a man with colonel's insignia. "Forgive us we do not attend your needs at once, but he says very important."

Diaz bowed to the courtesy, remembering what had been planted in his arm and feeling rather a bastard. Though it looked as if he wouldn't have occasion to use the thing. Dazed by relief and weariness, he let himself be escorted along corridors and tubes, until he stood before a door marked with great black Cyrillic warnings and guarded by two soldiers. Which was almost unheard of aboard a spaceship, he thought joltingly.

There was a teleye above the door. Diaz barely glanced at it. Whoever sat within the cabin must be staring through it at him. He tried to straighten his shoulders. "Martin Diaz," he husked, "Captain, U.S.A.C., serial number—"

Someone yelled from the loudspeaker beside the pick-up. Diaz half understood. He whirled about. His will gathered itself and surged. He began to think the impulses that would destroy the ship. A guard tackled him. A rifle butt came down on his head. And that was that.

They told him forty-eight hours passed while he was in sick bay. "I wouldn't know," he said dully. "Nor care." But he was again in good physical shape. Only a bandage sheathing his lower right arm, beneath the insigneless uniform given him, revealed that surgeons had been at work. His mind was sharply aware of its

environment—muscle play beneath his own skin, pastel bulkheads and cold fluorescence, faint machine-quiver underfoot, gusts from ventilator grilles, odors of foreign cooking. And always the men, with alien faces and carefully expressionless voices, who had caught him.

At least there was no abuse. They might have been justified in resenting his attempt to kill them. Some would call it treacherous. But they gave him the treatment due an officer and, except for supplying his needs, left him alone in his tiny bunk cubicle. Which in some respects was worse than punishment. Diaz was actually glad when he was at last summoned for an interview.

They brought him to the guarded door and gestured him through. It closed behind him.

For a moment Diaz noticed only the suite itself. Even a fleet commander didn't get this much space and comfort. The ship had long ceased accelerating, but spin provided a reasonable weight. The suite was constructed within a rotatable shell, so that the same deck was "down" as when the jets were in operation. Diaz stood on a Persian carpet, looking past low-legged furniture to a pair of arched doorways. One revealed a bedroom, lined with microspools—ye gods, there must be ten thousand volumes! The other showed part of an office, a desk and a great enigmatic control panel and—

The man seated beneath the Monet reproduction got up and made a slight bow. He was tall for a Unasian, with a lean mobile face whose eyes were startlingly blue against a skin as white as a Swedish girl's. His undress uniform was neat, but carelessly worn. No rank insignia was visible, for a gray hood, almost a coif, covered his head and fell over the shoulders.

"Good day, Captain Diaz," he said, speaking

English with little accent. "Permit me to introduce myself: General Leo Ilyitch Rostock, Cosmonautical Service of the People of United Asia."

Diaz went through the rituals automatically. Most of him was preoccupied with how quiet this place was. How very quiet. But the layout was serene. Rostock must be fantastically important if his comfort rated this much mass. Diaz's gaze flickered to the other man's waist. Rostock bore a sidearm. More to the point, though, one loud holler would doubtless be picked up by the teleye mike and bring in the guards outside.

Diaz tried to relax. *If they haven't kicked my teeth in so far, they don't plan to. I'm going to live.* But he couldn't believe that. Not here, in the presence of this hooded man. Even more so, in his drawing room. Its existence beyond Mars was too eerie. "No, sir, I have no complaints," he heard himself saying. "You run a good ship. My compliments."

"Thank you." Rostock had a charming, almost boyish smile. "Although this is not my ship, actually. Colonel Sumoro commands the *Ho Chi Minh*. I shall convey your appreciation to him."

"You may not be called the captain," Diaz said bluntly, "but the vessel is obviously your instrument."

Rostock shrugged. "Will you not sit down?" he invited, and resumed his own place on the couch. Diaz took a chair across the table from him, feeling knobby and awkward. Rostock pushed a box forward. "Cigarettes?"

"Thank you." Diaz struck and inhaled hungrily.

"I hope your arm does not bother you."

Diaz's belly muscles tightened. "No. It's all right."

"The surgeons left the metal ulnar bone in place, as well as its nervous and muscular connections. Complete replacement would have required more hospital equipment than a spaceship can readily carry. We did

not want to cripple you by removing the bone. After all, we were only interested in the cartridge."

Diaz gathered courage and snapped: "The more I see of you, General, the sorrier I am that it didn't work. You're big game."

Rostock chuckled. "Perhaps. I wonder, though, if you are as sorry as you would like to feel you are. You would have died too, you realize."

"Uh-huh."

"Do you know what the weapon embedded in you was?"

"Yes. We tell our people such things. A charge of isotopic explosive, with a trigger activated by a particular series of motor nerve pulses. Equivalent to about ten tons of TNT." Diaz gripped the chair arms, leaned forward and said harshly: "I'm not blabbing anything you don't now know. I daresay you consider it a violation of the customs of war. Not me! I gave no parole—"

"Certainly, certainly." Rostock waved a deprecating hand. "There are—what is your idiom?—no hard feelings. The device was ingenious. We have already dispatched a warning to our Central, whence the word can go out through the fleet, so your effort, the entire project, has gone for nothing. But it was a rather gallant attempt."

He leaned back, crossed one leg over the other, and regarded the American candidly. "Of course, as you implied, we would have proceeded somewhat differently," he said. "Our men would not have known what they carried, and the explosion would have been triggered posthypnotically, by some given class of situations, rather than consciously. In that way, there would be less chance of betrayal."

"How did you know, anyway?" Diaz sighed.

Rostock gave him an impish grin. "As the villain of this particular little drama, I shall only say that I have

my methods." Suddenly he was grave. "One reason we made such an effort to pick you up before your own rescue party arrived, was to gather data on what you have been doing, you people. You know how comparatively rare it is to get a prisoner in space warfare; and how hard to get spies into an organization of high morale which maintains its own laboratories and factories off Earth. Divergent developments can go far these days, before the other side is aware of them. The miniaturization involved in your own weapon, for example, astonished our engineers."

"I can't tell you anything else," Diaz said.

"Oh, you could," Rostock answered gently. "You know as well as I what can be done with a shot of babble juice. Not to mention other techniques—nothing melodramatic, nothing painful or disabling, merely applied neurology—in which I believe Unasia is ahead of the Western countries. But don't worry, Captain, I shall not permit any such breach of military custom.

"However, I do want you to understand how much trouble we went to, to get you. When combat began, I reasoned that the ships auxiliary to a dreadnaught would be the likeliest to suffer destruction of the type which leaves a few survivors. From the pattern of action in the first day, I deduced the approximate orbits and positions of several American capital ships. Unasian tactics throughout the second day were developed with two purposes: to inflict damage, of course, but also to get the *Ho* so placed that we would be likely to detect any distress signals. This cost us the *Genghis*—a calculated risk which did not pay off—I am not omniscient. But we did hear your call.

"You are quite right about the importance of this ship here. My superiors will be horrified at my action. But of necessity, they have given me *carte blanche*. And since the *Ho* itself takes no direct part in any

engagement, if we can avoid it, the probability of our being detected and attacked was small."

Rostock's eyes held Diaz's. He tapped the table, softly and repeatedly, with one fingernail. "Do you appreciate what all this means, Captain?" he asked. "Do you see how badly you were wanted?"

Diaz could only wet his lips and nod.

"Partly," Rostock said, smiling again, "there was the desire I have mentioned, to—er—check up on American activities during the last cease-fire period. But partly, too, there was a wish to bring you up to date on what we have been doing."

"*Huh?*" Diaz half scrambled from his chair, sagged back and gaped.

"The choice is yours, Captain," Rostock said. "You can be transferred to a cargo ship when we can arrange it, and so to an asteroid camp, and in general receive the normal treatment of a war prisoner. Or you may elect to hear what I would like to discuss with you. In the latter event, I can guarantee nothing. Obviously, I can't let you go home in a routine prisoner exchange with a prime military secret of ours. You will have to wait until it is no longer a secret. Until American Intelligence has learned the truth, and we know that they have. That may take years. It may take forever: because I have some hope that the knowledge will change certain of your own attitudes.

"No, no, don't answer now. Think it over. I will see you again tomorrow. In twenty-four hours, that is to say."

Rostock's eyes shifted past Diaz, as if to look through the bulkheads. His tone dropped suddenly to a whisper. "Have you ever wondered, like me, why we carry Earth's rotation period to space with us? Habit; practicality; but is there not also an element of magical thinking? A hope that somehow we can create

our own sunrises? The sky is very black out there. We need all the magic we can invent. Do we not?"

Some hours later, alarms sounded, voices barked over the intercoms, spin was halted but weight came quickly back as the ship accelerated.

Diaz knew just enough Mandarin to understand from what he overheard that radar contact had been made with American units and combat would soon resume. The guard who brought him dinner in his cubicle confirmed it, with many a bow and hissing smile. Diaz had gained enormous face by his audience with the man in the suite.

He couldn't sleep, though the racket soon settled down to a purposeful murmur with few loud interruptions. Restless in his bunk harness, he tried to reconstruct a total picture from what clues he had. The primary American objective was the asteroid base system of the enemy. But astromilitary tactics were too complicated for one brain to grasp. A battle might go on for months, flaring up whenever hostile units came near enough in their enormous orbitings to exchange fire. Eventually, Diaz knew, if everything went well—that is, didn't go too badly haywire—Americans would land on the Unasian worldlets. That would be the rough part. He remembered ground operations on Mars and Ganymede much too well.

As for the immediate situation, though, he could only make an educated guess. The leisurely pace at which the engagement was developing indicated that ships of dreadnaught mass were involved. Therefore no mere squadron was out there, but an important segment of the American fleet, perhaps the task force headed by the *Alaska*. But if this was true, then the *Ho Chi Minh* must be directing a flotilla of comparable size.

Which wasn't possible! Flotillas and subfleets were

bossed from dreadnaughts. A combat computer and its human staff were just too big and delicate to be housed in anything less. And the *Ho* was not even as large as the *Argonne* had been.

Yet what the hell was this but a command ship? Rostock had hinted as much. The activity aboard was characteristic, the repeated sound of courier boats coming and going, intercom calls, technicians hurrying along the corridors, but no shooting.

Nevertheless—

Voices jabbered beyond the cell door. Their note was triumphant. Probably they related a hit on an American vessel. Diaz recalled brushing aside chunks of space-frozen meat that had been his Corps brothers. Sammy Yoshida was in the *Utah Beach*, which was with the *Alaska*—Sammy who'd covered for him back at the Academy when he crawled in dead drunk hours after taps, and some years later had dragged him from a shell-struck foxhole on Mars and shared oxygen till a rescue squad happened by. Had the *Utah Beach* been hit? Was that what they were giggling about out there?

*Prisoner exchange, in a year or two or three, will get me back for the next round of the war,* Diaz thought in darkness. *But I'm only one man. And I've goofed somehow, spilled a scheme which might've cost the Unies several ships before they tumbled. It's hardly conceivable I could smuggle out whatever information Rostock wants to give me. But there'd be some tiny probability that I could, somehow, sometime. Wouldn't there?*

*I don't want to. Dios mio, how I don't want to! Let me rest a while, and then be swapped, and go back for a long furlough on Earth, where anything I ask for is mine and mainly I ask for sunlight and ocean and flowering trees. But Carl liked those things too, didn't he? Liked them and lost them forever.*

There came a lull in the battle. The fleets had passed each other, decelerating as they fired. They would take many hours to turn around and get back within combat range. A great quietness descended on the *Ho*. Walking down the passageways, which thrummed with rocketblast, Diaz saw how the technicians slumped at their posts. The demands on them were as hard as those on a pilot or gunner or missile chief. Evolution designed men to fight with their hands, not with computations and push buttons. Maybe ground combat wasn't the worst kind.

The sentries admitted Diaz through the door of the warning. Rostock sat at the table again. His coifed features looked equally drained, and his smile was automatic. A samovar and two teacups stood before him.

"Be seated, Captain," he said tonelessly. "Pardon me if I do not rise. This has been an exhausting time."

Diaz accepted a chair and a cup. Rostock drank noisily, eyes closed and forehead puckered. There might have been an extra stimulant in his tea, for before long he appeared more human. He refilled the cups, passed out cigarettes and leaned back on his couch with a sigh.

"You may be pleased to know," he said, "that the third pass will be the final one. We shall refuse further combat and proceed instead to join forces with another flotilla near Pallas."

"Because that suits your purposes better," Diaz said.

"Well, naturally. I compute a higher likelihood of ultimate success if we follow a strategy of— No matter now."

Diaz leaned forward. His heart slammed. "So this is a command ship," he exclaimed. "I thought so."

The blue eyes weighed him with care. "If I give you any further information," Rostock said—softly, but

the muscles tightened along his jaw—"you must accept the conditions I set forth."

"I do," Diaz got out.

"I realize that you do so in the hope of passing on the secret to your countrymen," Rostock said. "You may as well forget about that. You won't get the chance."

"Then why do you want to tell me? You won't make a Unie out of me, General." The words sounded too stuck-up, Diaz decided. "That is, I respect your people and, and so forth, but, uh, my loyalties lie elsewhere."

"Agreed. I don't hope or plan to change them. At least, not in an easterly direction." Rostock drew hard on his cigarette, let smoke stream from his nostrils and squinted through it. "The microphone is turned down," he remarked. "We cannot be overheard unless we shout. I must warn you, if you make any attempt to reveal what I am about to say to you to any of my own people, I shall not only deny it but order you sent out the airlock. It is that important."

Diaz rubbed his hands on his trousers. The palms were wet. "Okay," he said.

"Not that I mean to browbeat you, Captain," said Rostock hastily. "What I offer is friendship. In the end, maybe, peace." He sat a while longer looking at the wall, before his glance shifted back to Diaz's. "Suppose you begin the discussion. Ask me what you like."

"Uh—" Diaz floundered about, as if he'd been leaning on a door that was thrown open. "Uh . . . well, was I right? Is this a command ship?"

"Yes. It performs every function of a flag dreadnaught, except that it seldom engages in direct combat. The tactical advantages are obvious. A smaller, lighter vessel can get about much more readily, hence be a correspondingly more effective directrix. Further-

more, if due caution is exercised, we are not likely to be detected and fired at. The massive armament of a dreadnaught is chiefly to stave off the missiles which can annihilate the command post within. Ships of this class avoid that whole problem by avoiding attack in the first place."

"But your computer! You, uh, you must have developed a combat computer as . . . small and rugged as an autopilot—I thought miniaturization was our specialty."

Rostock laughed.

"And you'd still need a large human staff," Diaz protested. "Bigger than the whole crew of this ship!

"Wouldn't you?" he finished weakly.

Rostock shook his head. "No." His smile faded. "Not under this new system. I am the computer."

"What?"

"Look." Rostock pulled off his hood.

The head beneath was hairless, not shaved but depilated. A dozen silvery plates were set into it, flush with the scalp; there were outlets in them. Rostock pointed toward the office. "The rest of me is in there," he said. "I need only plug the jacks into the appropriate points of myself, and I become—no, not part of the computer. *It* becomes part of *me*."

He fell silent again, gazing now at the floor. Diaz hardly dared move, until his cigarette burned his fingers and he must stub it out. The ship pulsed around them. Monet's picture of sunlight caught in young leaves was like something seen at the far end of a tunnel.

"Consider the problem," Rostock said at last, low. "In spite of much loose talk about giant brains, computers do not think, except perhaps on an idiot level. They merely perform logical operations, symbol-shuffling, according to instructions given them. It was shown long ago that there are infinite classes of prob-

lems which no computer can solve: the classes dealt with in Godel's theorem, that can only be solved by the nonlogical process of creating a metalanguage. Creativity is not logical and computers do not create.

"In addition, as you know, the larger a computer becomes, the more staff it requires to perform such operations as data coding, programming, retranslation of the solutions into practical terms, and adjustment of the artificial answer to the actual problem. Yet your own brain does this sort of thing constantly . . . because it is creative. Moreover, the advanced computers are heavy, bulky, fragile things. They use cryogenics and all the other tricks, but that involves elaborate ancillary apparatus. Your brain weighs a kilogram or so, is very adequately protected in the skull and needs less than a hundred kilos of outside equipment—your body.

"I am not being mystical. There is no reason why creativity cannot someday be duplicated in an artificial structure. But I think that structure will look very much like a living organism; will, indeed, be one. Life has had a billion years to develop these techniques.

"Now, if the brain has so many advantages, why use a computer at all? Obviously, to do the uncreative work, for which the brain is not specifically designed. The brain visualizes a problem of, say, orbits, masses and tactics, and formulates it as a set of matrix equations. Then the computer goes swiftly through the millions of idiot counting operations needed to produce a numerical solution. What we have developed here, we Unasians, is nothing but a direct approach. We eliminate the middle man, as you Americans would say.

"In yonder office is a highly specialized computer. It is built from solid-state units, analogous to neurones, but in spite of being able to treat astromilitary problems, it is a comparatively small, simple and

sturdy device. Why? Because it is used in connection with my brain, which directs it. The normal computer must have its operational patterns built in. Mine develops synapse pathways as needed, just as a man's lower brain can develop skills under the direction of the cerebral cortex. And these pathways are modifiable by experience; the system is continually restructuring itself. The normal computer must have elaborate failure detection systems and arrangement for re-routing. I, in the hookup here, sense any trouble directly, and am no more disturbed by the temporary disability of some region than you are disturbed by the fact that most of your brain cells at any given time are resting.

"The human staff becomes superfluous here. My technicians bring me the data, which need not be reduced to standardized format. I link myself to the machine and—think about it—there are no words. The answer is worked out in no more time than any other computer would require. But it comes to my consciousness not as a set of figures, but in practical terms, decisions about what to do. Furthermore, the solution is modified by my human awareness of those factors too complex to go into physical condition—men and equipment, morale, long-range questions of logistics and strategy and ultimate goals. You might say this is a computer system with common sense. Do you understand, Captain?"

Diaz sat still for a long time before he said, "Yes. I think I do."

Rostock had gotten a little hoarse. He poured himself a fresh cup of tea and drank half, struck another cigarette and said earnestly: "The military value is obvious. Were that all, I would never have revealed this much to you. But something else developed as I practiced and increased my command of the system. Something quite unforeseen. I wonder if you will com-

prehend." He finished his cup. "That repeated experience changed me. I am no longer human. Not really."

The ship whispered, driving through darkness.

"I suppose a hookup like that would affect the emotions," Diaz ventured. "How does it feel?"

"There are no words," Rostock repeated, "except those I have made for myself." He rose and walked restlessly across the subdued rainbows in the carpet, hands behind his back, eyes focused on nothing Diaz could see. "As a matter of fact, the only emotional effect may be a simple intensification. Although . . . there are myths about mortals who became gods. How did it feel to them? I think they hardly noticed the palaces and music and feasting on Olympus. What mattered was how, piece by piece, as he mastered his new capacities, the new god won a god's understanding. His perception, involvement, detachment, totalness . . . there *are* no words."

Back and forth he paced, feet noiseless but metal and energies humming beneath his low and somehow troubled voice. "My cerebrum directs the computer," he said, "and the relationship becomes reciprocal. True, the computer part has no creativity of its own but it endows mine with a speed and sureness you cannot imagine. After all, a great part of original thought consists merely in proposing trial solutions. The scientist hypothesizes, the artist draws a charcoal line, the poet scribbles a phrase. Then they test them to see if they work. By now, to me, this mechanical aspect of imagination is back down on the subconscious level where it belongs. What my awareness senses is the final answer, springing to life almost simultaneously with the question, and yet with a felt reality to it such as comes only from having pondered and tested the issue for thousands of times.

"Also, the amount of sense data I can handle is

fantastic. Oh, I am blind and deaf and numb away from my machine half! So you will realize that over the months I have tended to spend more and more time in the linked state. When there was no immediate command problem to solve, I would sit and savor it."

In a practical tone: "That is how I perceived that you were about to sabotage us, Captain. Your posture alone betrayed you. I guessed the means at once and ordered the guards to knock you unconscious. I think, also, that I detected in you the potential I need. But that demands closer examination. Which is easily given. When I am linked, you cannot lie to me. The least insincerity is written across your whole organism."

He paused, to stand a little slumped, looking at the bulkhead. For a moment Diaz's legs tensed. *Three jumps and I can be there and get his gun!* But no, Rostock wasn't any brain-heavy dwarf. The body in that green uniform was young and trained. Diaz took another cigarette. "Okay," he said. "What do you propose?"

"First," Rostock said, turning about—and his eyes kindled—"I want you to understand what you and I are. What the spacemen of both factions are."

"Professional soldiers," Diaz grunted uneasily. Rostock waited. Diaz puffed hard and plowed on, since he was plainly expected to: "The only soldiers left. You can't count those ornamental regiments on Earth, nor the guys sitting by the big missiles. Those missiles will never be fired. World War Three was a large enough dose of nucleonics. Civilization was lucky to survive. Terrestrial life would be lucky to survive, next time around. So war has moved into space. Uh . . . professionalism . . . the old traditions of mutual respect and so forth have naturally revived." He made himself look up. "What more cliches need I repeat?"

"Suppose your side completely annihilated our ships," Rostock said. "What would happen?"

"Why . . . that's been discussed theoretically . . . by damn near every political scientist, hasn't it? The total command of space would not mean total command of Earth. We could destroy the whole eastern hemisphere without being touched. But we wouldn't because Unasia would fire its cobalt weapons while dying, and there'd be no western hemisphere to come home to either. Not that that situation will ever arise. Space is too big. There are too many ships and fortresses scattered around; combat is too slow a process. Neither fleet can wipe out the other."

"Since we have this perpetual stalemate, then," Rostock pursued, "why is there perpetual war?"

"Well, uh, partial victories are possible. Like our capture of Mars, or your destruction of three dreadnaughts in one month, on different occasions. The balance of power shifts. Rather than let its strength continue being whittled down, the side which is losing asks for a parley. There are negotiations, which end to the relative advantage of the stronger side. Meanwhile the arms race continues. Pretty soon a new dispute arises, the cease-fire ends, and maybe the other side is lucky that time."

"Is this situation expected to be eternal?"

"No!" Diaz stopped, thought a minute, and grinned with one corner of his mouth. "That is, they keep talking about an effective international organization. Trouble is, the two cultures are too far apart by now. They can't live together."

"I used to believe that myself," Rostock said. "Lately I have not been sure. A world federalism could be devised which would let both civilizations keep their identities. There have in fact been many such proposals, as you know. None has gotten beyond the talking stage. None ever will. Because you see,

what maintains the war is not the difference between our two cultures, but their similarity."

"Whoa, there!" Diaz bristled. "I resent that."

"Please," Rostock said. "I pass no moral judgments. For the sake of argument, at least, I can concede you the moral superiority, remarking only in parenthesis that Earth holds billions of people who not only fail to comprehend what you mean by freedom but would not like it if you gave it to them. The similarity I am talking about is technological. Both civilizations are based on the machine, with all the high organizations and dynamism which this implies."

"So?"

"So war is a necessity— Wait! I am not talking about 'merchants of death,' or 'dictators needing an outside enemy,' or whatever the current propaganda lines are. I mean that conflict is built into the culture. There *must* be an outlet for the destructive emotions generated in the mass of the people by the type of life they lead. A type of life for which evolution never designed them.

"Have you ever heard about L. F. Richardson? No? He was an Englishman in the last century, a Quaker, who hated war but, being a scientist, realized the phenomenon must be understood clinically before it can be eliminated. He performed some brilliant theoretical and statistical analyses which showed, for example, that the rate of deadly quarrels was very nearly constant over the decades. There could be many small clashes or a few major ones, but the result was the same. Why were the United States and the Chinese Empire so peaceful during the nineteenth century? The answer is that they were not. They had their Civil War and Taiping Rebellion, which devastated them as much as required. I need not multiply examples. We can discuss this later in detail. I have carried Richardson's work a good deal further and have studied the

problem more rigorously. I say to you now only that civilized societies must have a certain rate of immolations."

Diaz listened to silence for a minute before he said: "Well, I've sometimes thought the same. I suppose you mean we spacemen are the goats these days?"

"Exactly. War fought out here does not menace the planet. By our deaths we keep Earth alive."

Rostock sighed. His mouth drooped. "Magic works, you know," he said: "works on the emotions of the people who practice it. If a primitive witch doctor told a storm to go away, the storm did not hear, but the tribe did and took heart. The ancient analogy to us, though, is the sacrificial king in the early agricultural societies: a god in mortal form, who was regularly slain that the fields might bear fruit. This was not mere superstition. You must realize that. It worked—on the people. The rite was essential to the operation of their culture, to their sanity and hence to their survival.

"Today the machine age has developed its own sacrificial kings. We are the chosen of the race. The best it can offer. None gainsays us. We may have what we choose, pleasure, luxury, women, adulation—only not the simple pleasures of wife and child and home, for we must die that the people may live."

Again silence, until: "Do you seriously mean that's why the war goes on?" Diaz breathed.

Rostock nodded.

"But nobody—I mean, people wouldn't—"

"They do not reason these things out, of course. Traditions develop blindly. The ancient peasant did not elaborate logical reasons why the king must die. He merely knew this was so, and left the syllogism for modern anthropologists to expound. I did not see the process going on today until I had had the chance to

... to become more perceptive than I had been," Rostock said humbly.

Diaz couldn't endure sitting down any longer. He jumped to his feet. "Assuming you're right," he snapped, "and you may be, what of it? What can be done?"

"Much," Rostock said. Calm descended on his face like a mask. "I am not being mystical about this, either. The sacrificial king has reappeared as the end product of a long chain of cause and effect. There is no reason inherent in natural law why this must be. Richardson was right in his basic hope, that when war becomes understood, as a phenomenon, it can be eliminated. This would naturally involve restructuring the entire terrestrial culture. Gradually, subtly. Remember—" His hand shot out, seized Diaz's shoulder and gripped painfully hard. "There is a new element in history today. Us. The kings. We are not like those who spend their lives under Earth's sky. In some ways we are more, in other ways less, but always we are different. You and I are more akin to each other than to our planet-dwelling countrymen. Are we not?"

"In the time and loneliness granted me, I have used all my new powers to think about this. Not only think; this is so much more than cold reason. I have tried to feel. To love what is, as the Buddhists say. I believe a nucleus of spacemen like us, slowly and secretly gathered, wishing the good of everyone on Earth and the harm of none, gifted with powers and insights they cannot really imagine at home—I believe we may accomplish something. If not us, then our sons. Men ought not to kill each other, when the stars are waiting."

He let go, turned away and looked at the deck. "Of course," he mumbled, "I, in my peculiar situation, must first destroy a number of your brothers."

They had given Diaz a whole pack of cigarettes, an enormous treasure out here, before they locked him into his cubicle for the duration of the second engagement. He lay in harness, hearing clang and shout and engine roar through the vibrating bulkheads, stared at blackness and smoked until his tongue was foul. Sometimes the *Ho* accelerated, mostly it ran free and he floated. Once a tremor went through the entire hull, near miss by a shaped charge. Doubtless gamma rays, ignoring the magnetic force screens, sleeted through the men and knocked another several months off their life expectancies. Not that that mattered. Spacemen rarely lived long enough to worry about degenerative diseases. Diaz hardly noticed.

*He's not lying, Rostock. Why should he? What could he gain? He may be a nut, of course. But he doesn't act like a nut either. He wants me to study his statistics and equations, satisfy myself that he's right. And he must be damn sure I will be convinced, to tell me as much as he has.*

*How many are there like him? Only a very few, I'm sure. The man-machine symbiosis is obviously new, or we'd've had some inkling ourselves. This is the first field trial of the system. I wonder if the others have reached the same conclusions as Rostock. No, he said he doubts that. Their psychology impressed him as being more deeply channeled than his. He's a lucky accident.*

*Lucky? Now how can I tell? I'm only a man. I've never experienced an IQ of 1,000, or whatever the figure may be. A god's purposes aren't necessarily what a man would elect.*

The eventual end to war? Well, other institutions had been ended, at least in the Western countries; judicial torture, chattel slavery, human sacrifice—No, wait, according to Rostock human sacrifice had been revived.

"But is our casualty rate high enough to fit your equations?" Diaz had argued. "Space forces aren't as big as old-time armies. No country could afford that."

"Other elements than death must be taken into account," Rostock answered. "The enormous expense is one factor. Taxpaying is a form of symbolic self-mutilation. It also tends to direct civilian resentments and aggressions against their own government, thus taking some pressure off international relations."

"Chiefly, though, there is the matter of emotional intensity. A spaceman not only dies, he usually dies horribly; and that moment is the culmination of a long period under grisly conditions. His groundling brothers, administrative and service personnel, suffer vicariously: 'sweat it out,' as your idiom so well expresses the feeling. His kinfolk, friends, women, are likewise racked. When Adonis dies—or Osiris, Tammuz, Baldur, Christ, Tlaloc, whichever of his hundred names you choose—the people must in some degree share his agony. That is part of the sacrifice."

Diaz had never thought about it just that way. Like most Corpsmen, he had held the average civilian in thinly disguised contempt. But . . . from time to time, he remembered, he'd been glad his mother died before he enlisted. And why did his sister hit the bottle so hard? Then there had been Lois, she of the fire-colored hair and violet eyes, who wept as if she would never stop weeping when he left for duty. He'd promised to get in touch with her on his return, but of course he knew better.

Which did not erase memories of men whose breath and blood came exploding from burst helmets; who shuddered and vomited and defecated in the last stages of radiation sickness; who stared without immediate comprehension at a red spurt which a second ago had been an arm or a leg; who went insane and must be gassed because psychoneurosis is catching on

a six months' orbit beyond Saturn; who— Yeah, Carl had been lucky.

You could talk as much as you wished about Corps brotherhood, honor, tradition, and gallantry. It remained sentimental guff . . .

No, that was unjust. The Corps had saved the people, their lives and liberties. There could be no higher achievement—for the Corps. But knighthood had once been a noble thing, too. Then, lingering after its day, it became a yoke and eventually a farce. The warrior virtues were not ends in themselves. If the warrior could be made obsolete—

Could he? How much could one man, even powered by a machine, hope to do? How much could he even hope to understand?

The moment came upon Diaz. He lay as if blinded by shellburst radiance.

As consciousness returned, he knew first, irrelevantly, what it meant to get religion.

"By God," he told the universe, "we're going to try!"

The battle would resume very shortly. At any moment, in fact, some scoutship leading the American force might fire a missile. But when Diaz told his guard he wanted to speak with General Rostock, he was taken there within minutes.

The door closed behind him. The living room lay empty, altogether still except for the machine throb, which was not loud since the *Ho* was running free. Because acceleration might be needful on short notice, there was no spin. Diaz hung weightless as fog. And the Monet flung into his eyes all Earth's sunlight and summer forests.

"Rostock?" he called uncertainly.

"Come," said a voice, almost too low to hear. Diaz gave a shove with his foot and flew toward the office.

He stopped himself by grasping the doorjamb. A semicircular room lay before him, the entire side taken up by controls and meters. Lights blinked, needles wavered on dials, buttons and switches and knobs reached across black paneling. But none of that was important. Only the man at the desk mattered, who free-sat with wires running from his head to the wall.

Rostock seemed to have lost weight. Or was that an illusion? The skin was drawn taut across his high cheekbones and gone a dead, glistening white. His nostrils were flared and the colorless lips held tense. Diaz looked into his eyes, once, and then away again. He could not meet them. He could not even think about them. He drew a shaken breath and waited.

"You made your decision quickly," Rostock whispered. "I had not awaited you until after the engagement."

"I . . . I didn't think you would see me till then."

"This is more important." Diaz felt as if he were being probed with knives. He could not altogether believe it was his imagination. He stared desperately at the paneled instruments. Their nonhumanness was like a comforting hand. *They must only be for the benefit of maintenance techs*, he thought in a very distant part of himself. *The brain doesn't need them.*

"You are convinced," Rostock said in frank surprise.

"Yes," Diaz answered.

"I had not expected that. I only hoped for your reluctant agreement to study my work." Rostock regarded him for a still century. "You were ripe for a new faith," he decided. "I had not taken you for the type. But then, the mind can only use what data are given it, and I have hitherto had little opportunity to meet Americans. Never since I became what I am. You have another psyche from ours."

"I need to understand your findings, sir," Diaz said.

"Right now I can only believe. That isn't enough, is it?"

Slowly, Rostock's mouth drew into a smile of quite human warmth. "Correct. But given the faith, intellectual comprehension should be swift."

"I . . . I shouldn't be taking your time . . . now, sir," Diaz stammered. "How should I begin? Should I take some books back with me?"

"No." Acceptance had been reached. Rostock spoke resonantly, a master to his trusted servant. "I need your help here. Strap into yonder harness. Our first necessity is to survive the battle upon us. You realize that this means sacrificing many of your comrades. I know how much that will hurt you. Afterward we shall spend our lives repaying our people—both our peoples. But today I shall ask you questions about your fleet. Any information is valuable, especially details of construction and armament which our intelligence has not been able to learn."

*Doña mia.* Diaz let go the door, covered his face and fell free, endlessly. *Help me.*

"It is not betrayal," said the superman. "It is the ultimate loyalty you can offer."

Diaz made himself look at the cabin again. He shoved against the bulkhead and stopped by the harness near the desk.

"You cannot lie to me," said Rostock. "Do not deny how much pain I am giving you." Diaz glimpsed his fists clamping together. "Each time I look at you, I share what you feel."

Diaz clung to his harness. There went an explosion through him.

NO, BY GOD!

Rostock screamed.

"Don't," Diaz sobbed. "I don't want—" But wave after wave ripped outward. Rostock flopped about in

his harness and shrieked. The scene came back, ramming home like a bayonet.

"We like to put an extra string on our bow," the psych officer said. Lunar sunlight, scarcely softened by the dome, blazed off his bronze eagles, wings and beaks. "You know that your right ulna will be replaced with a metal section in which there is a nerve-triggered nuclear cartridge. But that may not be all, gentlemen."

He bridged his fingers. The young men seated on the other side of his desk stirred uneasily. "In this country," the psych officer said, "we don't believe humans should be turned into puppets. Therefore you will have voluntary control of your bombs; no post-hypnosis, Pavlov reflex or any such insult. However, those of you who are willing will receive a rather special extra treatment, and that fact will be buried from the consciousness of all of you.

"Our reasoning is that if and when the Unasians learn about the prisoner weapons, they'll remove the cartridge by surgery but leave the prosthetic bone in place. And they will, we hope, not examine it in microscopic detail. Therefore they won't know that it contains an oscillator, integrated with the crystal structure. Nor will you; because what you don't know, you can't babble under anesthesia.

"The opportunity may come, if you are captured and lose your bomb, to inflict damage by this reserve means. You may find yourself near a crucial electronic device, for example a spaceship's autopilot. At short range, the oscillator will do an excellent job of bollixing it. Which will at least discomfit the enemy, and may even give you a chance to escape.

"The posthypnotic command will be such that you'll remember about this oscillator when conditions seem right for using it. Not before. Of course, the human

mind is a damned queer thing, that twists and turns and bites its own tail. In order to make an opportunity to strike this blow, your subconscious may lead you down strange paths. It may even have you seriously contemplating treason, if treason seems the only way of getting access to what you can wreck. Don't let that bother you afterward, gentlemen. Your superiors will know what happened.

"Nevertheless, the experience may be painful. And post-hypnosis is, at best, humiliating to a free man. So this aspect of the program is strictly volunteer. Does anybody want to go for broke?"

The door flung open. The guards burst in. Diaz was already behind the desk, next to Rostock. He yanked out the general's sidearm and fired at the soldiers. Free fall recoil sent him back against the computer panel. He braced himself, fired again and used his left elbow to smash the nearest meter face.

Rostock clawed at the wires in his head. For a moment Diaz guessed what it must be like to have random oscillations in your brain, amplified by an electronic engine that was part of you. He laid the pistol to the screaming man's temple and fired once more.

Now to get out! He shoved hard, arrowing past the sentries, who rolled through the air in a crimson galaxy of blood globules. Confusion boiled in the corridor beyond. Someone snatched at him. He knocked the fellow aside and dove along a tubeway. Somewhere hereabouts should be a scooter locker—there, and nobody around!

He didn't have time to get on a spacesuit, even if a Unasian one would have fitted, but he slipped on an air dome over the scooter. That, with the heater unit and oxy reclaim, would serve. He didn't want to

get off anywhere en route; not before he'd steered the machine through an American hatch.

With luck, he'd do that. Their command computer gone, the enemy were going to get smeared. American ships would close in as the slaughter progressed. Eventually one should come within range of the scooter's little radio.

He set the minilock controls, mounted the saddle, dogged the air dome and waited for ejection. It came none too soon. Three soldiers had just appeared down the passageway. Diaz applied full thrust and jetted away from the *Ho*. Its blackness was soon lost among the star clouds.

Battle commenced. The first Unasian ship to be destroyed must have been less than fifty miles distant. Luckily, Diaz was facing the other way when the missile exploded.



# THE MAN WHO MADE FRIENDS WITH ELECTRICITY

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BY FRITZ LEIBER (1910- )

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MARCH

*Here's Science Fiction Writers of America Grandmaster Fritz Leiber again, with one of his most unusual stories, one that reads like it might have been written by the late Philip K. Dick.*

*"The Man Who Made Friends With Electricity" may be science fiction, it may be fantasy, or it may be neither. What it is is unforgettable.*

When Mr. Scott showed Peak House to Mr. Leverett, he hoped he wouldn't notice the high-tension pole outside the bedroom window, because it had twice before queered promising rentals—so many elderly people were foolishly nervous about electricity. There was nothing to be done about the pole except try to draw prospective tenants' attention away from it—electricity follows the hilltops and these lines supplied more than half the juice used in Pacific Knolls.

But Mr. Scott's prayers and suave misdirections were in vain—Mr. Leverett's sharp eyes lit on the "negative feature" the instant they stepped out on the patio. The old New Englander studied the short thick wooden column, the 18-inch ridged glass insulators,

the black transformer box that stepped down voltage for this house and a few others lower on the slope. His gaze next followed the heavy wires swinging off rhythmically four abreast across the empty gray-green hills. Then he cocked his head as his ears caught the low but steady frying sound, varying from a crackle to a buzz of electrons leaking off the wires through the air.

"Listen to that!" Mr. Leverett said, his dry voice betraying excitement for the first time in the tour. "Fifty thousand volts if there's five! A power of power!"

"Must be unusual atmospheric conditions today—normally you can't hear a thing," Mr. Scott responded lightly, twisting the truth a little.

"You don't say?" Mr. Leverett commented, his voice dry again, but Mr. Scott knew better than to encourage conversation about a negative feature. "I want you to notice this lawn," he launched out heartily. "When the Pacific Knolls Golf Course was subdivided, the original owner of Peak House bought the entire eighteenth green and—"

For the rest of the tour Mr. Scott did his state-certified real estate broker's best, which in Southern California is no mean performance, but Mr. Leverett seemed a shade perfunctory in the attention he accorded it. Inwardly Mr. Scott chalked up another defeat by the damn pole.

On the quick retrace, however, Mr. Leverett insisted on their lingering on the patio. "Still holding out," he remarked about the buzz with an odd satisfaction. "You know, Mr. Scott, that's a restful sound to me. Like wind or a brook or the sea. I hate the clatter of machinery—that's the *other* reason I left New England—but this is like a sound of nature. Downright soothing. But you say it comes seldom?"

Mr. Scott was flexible—it was one of his great virtues as a salesman.

"Mr. Leverett," he confessed simply, "I've never stood on this patio when I didn't hear that sound. Sometimes it's softer, sometimes louder, but it's always there. I play it down, though, because most people don't care for it."

"Don't blame you," Mr. Leverett said. "Most people are a pack of fools or worse. Mr. Scott, are any of the people in the neighboring houses Communists to your knowledge?"

"No, sir!" Mr. Scott responded without an instant's hesitation. "There's not a Communist in Pacific Knolls. And that's something, believe me, I'd never shade the truth on."

"Believe you," Mr. Leverett said. "The east's packed with Communists. Seem scarcer out here. Mr. Scott, you've made yourself a deal. I'm taking a year's lease on Peak House as furnished and at the figure we last mentioned."

"Shake on it!" Mr. Scott boomed. "Mr. Leverett, you're the kind of person Pacific Knolls wants."

They shook. Mr. Leverett rocked on his heels, smiling up at the softly crackling wires with a satisfaction that was already a shade possessive.

"Fascinating thing, electricity," he said. "No end to the tricks it can do or you can do with it. For instance, if a man wanted to take off for elsewhere in an elegant flash, he'd only have to wet down the lawn good and take twenty-five foot of heavy copper wire in his two bare hands and whip the other end of it over those lines. Whang! Every bit as good as Sing Sing and lot more satisfying to a man's inner needs."

Mr. Scott experienced a severe though momentary sinking of heart and even for one wildly frivolous moment considered welshing on the verbal agreement he'd just made. He remembered the red-haired lady who'd rented an apartment from him solely to have a quiet place in which to take an overdose of barbitu-

rates. Then he reminded himself that Southern California is, according to a wise old saw, the home (actual or aimed-at) of the peach, the nut and the prune; and while he'd had few dealings with real or would-be starlets, he'd had enough of crackpots and retired grouches. Even if you piled fanciful death wishes and a passion for electricity atop rabid anti-communist and anti-machine manias, Mr. Leverett's personality was no more than par for the S. Cal. course.

Mr. Leverett said shrewdly, "You're worrying now, aren't you, I might be a suicider? Don't. Just like to think my thoughts. Speak them out too, however peculiar."

Mr. Scott's last fears melted and he became once more his pushingly congenial self as he invited Mr. Leverett down to the office to sign the papers.

Three days later he dropped by to see how the new tenant was making out and found him in the patio ensconced under the buzzing pole in an old rocker.

"Take a chair and sit," Mr. Leverett said, indicating one of the tubular modern pieces. "Mr. Scott, I want to tell you I'm finding Peak House every bit as restful as I hoped. I listen to the electricity and let my thoughts roam. Sometimes I hear voices in the electricity—the wires talking, as they say. You've heard of people who hear voices in the wind?"

"Yes, I have," Mr. Scott admitted a bit uncomfortably and then, recalling that Mr. Leverett's check for the first quarter's rent was safely cleared, was emboldened to speak his own thoughts. "But wind is a sound that varies a lot. That buzz is pretty monotonous to hear voices in."

"Pshaw," Mr. Leverett said with a little grin that made it impossible to tell how seriously he meant to be taken. "Bees are highly intelligent insects, ento-

mologists say they even have a language, yet they do nothing but buzz. I hear voices in the electricity."

He rocked silently for a while after that and Mr. Scott sat.

"Yep, I hear voices in the electricity," Mr. Leverett said dreamily. "Electricity tells me how it roams the forty-eight states—even the forty-ninth by way of Canadian power lines. Electricity goes everywhere today—into our homes, every room of them, into our offices, into government buildings and military posts. And what it doesn't learn that way it overhears by the trace of it that trickles through our phone lines and over our air waves. Phone electricity's the little sister of power electricity, you might say, and little pitchers have big ears. Yep, electricity knows everything about us, our every last secret. Only it wouldn't think of telling most people what it knows, because they believe electricity is a cold mechanical force. It isn't—it's warm and pulsing and sensitive and friendly underneath, like any other live thing."

Mr. Scott, feeling a bit dreamy himself now, thought what good advertising copy that would make—imaginative stuff, folksy but poetic.

"*And* electricity's got a mite of viciousness too," Mr. Leverett continued. "You got to tame it. Know its ways, speak it fair, show no fear, make friends with it. Well now, Mr. Scott," he said in a brisker voice, standing up, "I know you've come here to check up on how I'm caring for Peak House. So let me give *you* the tour."

And in spite of Mr. Scott's protests that he had no such inquisitive intention, Mr. Leverett did just that.

Once he paused for an explanation: "I've put away the electric blanket and the toaster. Don't feel right about using electricity for menial jobs."

As far as Mr. Scott could see, he had added nothing

to the furnishings of Peak House beyond the rocking chair and a large collection of Indian arrow heads.

Mr. Scott must have talked about the latter when he got home, for a week later his nine-year-old son said to him, "Hey, Dad, you know that old guy you unloaded Peak House onto?"

"Rented is the only proper expression, Bobby."

"Well, I went up to see his arrow heads. Dad, it turns out he's a snake-charmer!"

*Dear God,* thought Mr. Scott, *I knew there was going to be something really impossible about Leverett. Probably like hilltops because they draw snakes in hot weather.*

"He didn't charm a real snake, though, Dad, just an old extension cord. He squatted down on the floor—this was after he showed me those crumby arrow heads—and waved his hands back and forth over it and pretty soon the end with the little box on it started to move around on the floor and all of a sudden it lifted up, like a cobra out of a basket. It was real spooky!"

"I've seen that sort of trick," Mr. Scott told Bobby. "There's a fine thread attached to the end of the wire pulling it up."

"I'd have seen a thread, Dad."

"Not if it were the same color as the background," Mr. Scott explained. Then he had a thought. "By the way Bobby, was the other end of the cord plugged in?"

"Oh it was, Dad! He said he couldn't work the trick unless there was electricity in the cord. Because you see, Dad, he's really an electricity-charmer. I just said snake-charmer to make it more exciting. Afterwards we went outside and he charmed electricity down out of the wires and made it crawl all over his body. You could see it crawl from part to part."

"But how could you see that?" Mr. Scott

demanded, struggling to keep his voice casual. He had a vision of Mr. Leverett standing dry and sedate, entwined by glimmering blue serpents with flashing diamond eyes and fangs that sparked.

"By the way it would make his hair stand on end, Dad. First on one side of his head, then on the other. Then he said, 'Electricity, crawl down my chest,' and a silk handkerchief hanging out of his top pocket stood out stiff and sharp. Dad, it was almost as good as the Museum of Science and Industry!"

Next day Mr. Scott dropped by Peak House, but he got no chance to ask his carefully thought-out questions, for Mr. Leverett greeted him with, "Reckon your boy told you about the little magic show I put on for him yesterday. I like children, Mr. Scott. Good Republican children like yours, that is."

"Why yes, he did," Mr. Scott admitted, disarmed and a bit flustered by the other's openness.

"I only showed him the simplest tricks, of course. Kid stuff."

"Of course," Mr. Scott echoed. "I guessed you must have used a fine thread to make the extension cord dance."

"Reckon you know all the answers, Mr. Scott," the other said, his eyes flashing. "But come across to the patio and sit for a while."

The buzzing was quite loud that day, yet after a bit Mr. Scott had to admit to himself that it *was* a restful sound. And it had more variety than he'd realized—mounting crackles, fading sizzles, hisses, hums, clicks, sighs: If you listened to it long enough, you probably would begin to hear voices.

Mr. Leverett, silently rocking, said, "Electricity tells me about all the work it does and all the fun it has—dances, singing, big crackling band concerts, trips to the stars, foot races that make rockets seem like snails. Worries, too. You know that electric break-

down they had in New York? Electricity told me why. Some of its folks went crazy—overwork, I guess—and just froze. It was a while before they could send others in from outside New York and heal the crazy ones and start them moving again through the big copper web. Electricity tells me it's fearful the same thing's going to happen in Chicago and San Francisco. Too much pressure.

"Electricity doesn't *mind* working for us. It's generous-hearted and it loves its job. But it would be grateful for a little more consideration—a little more recognition of its special problems.

"It's got its savage brothers to contend with, you see—the wild electricity that rages in storms and haunts the mountaintops and comes down to hunt and kill. Not civilized like the electricity in the wires, though it will be some day.

"For civilized electricity's a great teacher. Shows us how to live clean and in unity and brother-love. Power fails one place, electricity's rushing in from everywhere to fill the gap. Serves Georgia same as Vermont, Los Angeles same as Boston. Patriotic too—only revealed its greatest secrets to true-blue Americans like Edison and Franklin. Did you know it killed a Swede when he tried that kite trick? Yep, electricity's the greatest power for good in all the U.S.A."

Mr. Scott thought sleepily of what a neat little electricity cult Mr. Leverett could set up, every bit as good as Science of Mind or Krishna Venta or the Rosicrucians. He could imagine the patio full of earnest seekers while Krishna Leverett—or maybe High Electro Leverett—dispensed wisdom from his rocker, interpreting the words of the humming wires. Better not suggest it, though—in Southern California such things had a way of coming true.

Mr. Scott felt quite easy at heart as he went down

the hill, though he did make a point of telling Bobby not to bother Mr. Leverett any more.

But the prohibition didn't apply to himself. During the next months Mr. Scott made a point of dropping in at Peak House from time to time for a dose of "electric wisdom." He came to look forward to these restful, amusingly screwy breaks in the hectic round. Mr. Leverett appeared to do nothing whatever except sit in his rocker on the patio, yet stayed happy and serene. There was a lesson for anybody in that, if you thought about it.

Occasionally Mr. Scott spotted amusing side effects of Mr. Leverett's eccentricity. For instance, although he sometimes let the gas and water bills go, he always paid up phone and electricity on the dot.

And the newspapers eventually did report short but severe electric breakdowns in Chicago and San Francisco. Smiling a little frowningly at the coincidences, Mr. Scott decided he could add fortune-telling to the electricity cult he'd imagined for Mr. Leverett. "Your life's story foretold in the wires!"—more novel, anyway, than crystal balls or Talking with God.

Only once did the touch of the gruesome, that had troubled Mr. Scott in his first conversation with Mr. Leverett, come briefly back, when the old man chuckled and observed, "Recall what I told you about whipping a copper wire up there? I've thought of a simpler way, just squirt the hose at those H-T lines in a hard stream, gripping the metal nozzle. Might be best to use the hot water and throw a box of salt in the heater first." When Mr. Scott heard that he was glad that he'd warned Bobby against coming around.

But for the most part Mr. Leverett maintained his mood of happy serenity.

When the break in that mood came, it did so suddenly, though afterwards, Mr. Scott realized there had been one warning note sounded when Mr. Leverett

had added onto a rambling discourse, "By the way, I've learned that power electricity goes all over the world, just like the ghost electricity in radios and phones. It travels to foreign shores in batteries and condensers. Roams the lines in Europe and Asia. Some of it even slips over into Soviet territory. Wants to keep tabs on the Communists, I guess. Electric freedom-fighters."

On his next visit Mr. Scott found a great change. Mr. Leverett had deserted his rocking chair to pace the patio on the side away from the pole, though every now and then he would give a quick funny look up over his shoulder at the dark muttering wires.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Scott. I'm real shook up. Reckon I better tell someone about it so if something happens to me they'll be able to tell the FBI. Though I don't know what *they*'ll be able to do.

"Electricity just told me this morning it's got a world government—it had the nerve to call it that—and that it doesn't care a snap for either us *or* the Soviets and that there's Russian electricity in our wires and American electricity in theirs—it shifts back and forth with never a quiver of shame.

"When I heard that you could have knocked me down with a paper dart.

"What's more, electricity's determined to stop any big war that may come, no matter how rightful that war be or how much in defense of America. If the buttons are pushed for the atomic missiles, electricity's going to freeze and refuse to budge. And it'll flash out and kill anybody who tries to set them off another way.

"I pleaded with electricity, I told it I'd always thought of it as American and true—reminded it of Franklin and Edison—finally I commanded it to change its ways and behave decent, but it just chuckled at me with never a spark of love or loyalty.

"Then it threatened me back! It told me if I tried to stop it, if I revealed its plans it would summon down its savage brothers from the mountains and with their help it would seek me out and kill me! Mr. Scott, I'm all alone up here with electricity on my window sill. What am I going to do?"

Mr. Scott had considerable difficulty soothing Mr. Leverett enough to make his escape. In the end he had to promise to come back in the morning bright and early—silently vowing to himself that he'd be damned if he would.

His task was not made easier when the electricity overhead, which had been especially noisy this day, rose in a growl and Mr. Leverett turned and said harshly, "Yes, I hear!"

That night the Los Angeles area had one of its very rare thunderstorms, accompanied by gales of wind and torrents of rain. Palms and pines and eucalyptus were torn down, earth cliffs crumbled and sloshed, and the great square concrete spillways ran brimful from the hills to the sea.

The lightning was especially fierce. Several score Angelinos, to whom such a display was a novelty, phoned civil defense numbers to report or inquire fearfully about atomic attack.

Numerous freak accidents occurred. To the scene of one of these Mr. Scott was summoned next morning bright and early by the police—because it had occurred on a property he rented and because he was the only person known to be acquainted with the deceased.

The previous night Mr. Scott had awakened at the height of the storm when the lightning had been blinding as a photoflash and the thunder had cracked like a mile-long whip just above the roof. At that time he had remembered vividly what Mr. Leverett had said about electricity threatening to summon its wild giant

brothers from the hills. But now, in the bright morning, he decided not to tell the police about that or say anything to them at all about Mr. Leverett's electricity mania—it would only complicate things to no purpose and perhaps make the fear at his heart more crazily real.

Mr. Scott saw the scene of the freak accident before anything was moved, even the body—except there was now, of course, no power in the heavy corroded wire wrapped tight as a bullwhip around the skinny shanks with only the browned and blackened fabric of cotton pyjamas between.

The police and the power-and-light men reconstructed the accident this way: At the height of the storm one of the high-tension lines had snapped a hundred feet away from the house and the end, whipped by the wind and its own tension, had struck back freakishly through the open bedroom window of Peak House and curled once around the legs of Mr. Leverett, who had likely been on his feet at the time, killing him instantly.

One had to strain that reconstruction, though, to explain the additional freakish elements in the accident—the facts that the high-tension wire had struck not only through the bedroom window, but then through the bedroom door to catch the old man in the hall, and that the black shiny cord of the phone was wrapped like a vine twice around the old man's right arm, as if to hold him back from escaping until the big wire had struck.

# HANG HEAD, VANDAL!

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BY MARK CLIFTON (1903-63)

AMAZING  
APRIL

*Although Mark Clifton left us only some twenty short stories and three novels, he influenced a large number of writers in the science fiction field because, as Barry N. Malzberg has pointed out, he "imposed upon these standard themes (alien invasion, space travel, etc.) the full range of sophisticated psychological insight. His obsession was to show truthfully how a cross section of humanity would react to a future alternately mindless and stunning."*

*As in "Hang Head, Vandal!," the last important story he published in a remarkable life.*

On our abandoned Martian landing field there hangs a man's discarded spacesuit, suspended from the desensitized prongs of a Come-to-me tower. It is stuffed with straw that was filched, no doubt, from packing cases which brought out so many more delicate, sensitive, precision instruments than we will take back.

None knows which of our departing crew hanged the spacesuit there, nor exactly what he meant in the act. A scarecrow to frighten all others away?

More likely a mere Kilroy-was-here symbol: defacing initials irresistibly carved in a priceless, ancient work of art, saying, "I am too shoddy a specimen to create anything of worth, but I can deface. And this proves I, too, have been."

Or was it symbolic suicide: an expression of guilt so overpowering that man hanged himself in effigy upon the scene of his crime?

Captain Leyton saw it there on the morning of final departure. He saw it, and felt a sudden flush of his usual stern discipline surge within him; and he all but formed the harsh command to take that thing down at once. Find the one who hanged it there: Bring him to me!

The anger—the command. Died together. Unspoken.

Something in the pose of the stuffed effigy hanging there must have got down through to the diminishing person inside the ever-thickening rind of a commander. The forlorn sadness, the dejection; and yes, he too must have felt the shame, the guilt, that overwhelmed us all.

Whether the helmet had fallen forward of its own weight because the vandal had been careless in stuffing it with too little straw to hold its head erect—vandals being characteristically futile even in their vandalism—or whether, instead of the supposed vandal, this was the talent of a consummate artist molding steel and rubber, plastic and straw into an expression of how we all felt—no matter, the result was there.

The Captain did not command the effigy be taken down. No one offered and no one asked if that might be his wish—not even the ubiquitous Ensign perpetually bucking for approval.

So on an abandoned Martian landing field there hangs a discarded spacesuit—the image of man stuffed

with straw; with straw where heart, and mind, and soul ought to be.

At the time it seemed a most logical solution to an almost impossible problem.

Dr. VanDam summed it up in his memorable speech before the United Nations. If he were visually conscious of the vault of face blurs in the hushed assembly, this lesser sight did not obscure his stronger vision of the great vaulted mass of shining stars in the black of space.

He may not even have been conscious of political realities, which ever obscure man's dreams. What he said would be weighed by each delegate in terms of personal advantage to be gained for his own status. Second, his words would be weighed again in terms of national interest. Third, what advantage could be squeezed out for the racial-religious-color blocs? At the fourth level of consideration, what advantage to the small nation bloc over the large; or how would his plan enhance the special privileges of the large over the small? Down at the fifth level, could it preserve the status quo, changing nothing so that those in power could remain in power, while, at the same time, giving the illusion of progress to confound the ever-clamoring liberals? At the deep sixth level, if one ever got down that far, one might give a small fleeting thought to what might be good for mankind.

If Dr. VanDam even knew that such political realities must ever take precedence over the dreams of science, he gave no sign of it. It was as if all his thought was upon the glory of the stars and the dream of man reaching out to them. It was the goal of reaching the stars that inspired his speech.

"We must sum up the problem," he was saying. "It is simply this. There is a limit to how far we can theorize in science without testing those theories to see if

they will work. Sooner or later the theorist must submit to the engineer whose acid test of worth is simply this: 'Does it work?'

"We have always known that the Roman candles we are using for our timid little space flights can take us only to the nearest planets, for there is that inexorable ratio of time to initial thrust. Unless thrust continues and continues, the Mayfly lifetime of man will expire many times over before we can reach the nearest star. Nor will our limited resources fuel ion engines. We must learn how to replenish with space dust gathered along the way.

"To have continuous velocity we must have continuous nuclear power. To have continuous nuclear power, we must have more nuclear tests. Now we believe we know how to take not special ores but ordinary matter, of any kind, and convert it into nuclear power. We believe we can control this. We have this in theory. But the engineer had not tested it with his question, 'Does it work?'

"We cannot make these tests on Earth. For what if it does not work? We dare not use the Moon. Its lighter gravity makes it too valuable a piece of real estate in terms of future star journeys. It will be our busy landing stage; we dare not contaminate it nor risk destroying it.

"We have reached stalemate. On Earth and Moon we can go on no further without testing. On Earth and Moon we dare not test. Some other testing area must be found.

"Our explorers have brought us conclusive proof that Mars is a dead world. A useless world in terms of life. Useless, too, as a source of minerals, for our little Roman candles can carry no commercial payload. A useless world for colonization, with air too tenuous for human lungs and water too scarce for growing food. Humans must be housed in sealed

chambers, or wear spacesuits constantly. From all practical points of view, a worthless world.

"But invaluable to science. For there, without destroying anything of value to man, we can put our theories to test. We believe we can start a nuclear reaction in ordinary rock and dirt, and keep it under control to produce a continuous flow of power. We believe we can keep it from running wild out of control.

"If the innumerable tests we must run *do* contaminate the planet, or even destroy it slowly, our gain in knowledge will be greater than the loss of this worthless real estate."

There was a stir in the Assembly: something between a gasp of horror and a murmur of admiration at the audacity of man's sacrificing a whole planet to his knowledge. They had not known we were so far along the way.

And then, on second thought, a settling back in satisfaction. It seemed a simple solution to an impossible problem. To take not only VanDam's tests away from Earth, but nuclear testing of every kind! To quell the fears and still the clamoring of the humanists who would rather see man stagnate in ignorance than risk the future to learn. At every level of political reality this might turn to advantage. If there were any who still thought in such terms, it might even be good for mankind generally!

"I am not mystic minded," VanDam continued, when the rustle and murmur had diminished, "but the convenience of this particular planet, located precisely where it is, far enough away that we must have made great progress in science to reach it, and close enough to be ready when we need it for further progress—this seems almost mystical in its coincidence."

(That for the ones who would have to go through

the usual motions of obtaining Higher Power approval for doing what they fully intended doing all along.)

"My question: Shall the nations of Earth agree upon our use of this so convenient and otherwise worthless stage placed right where we need it—waiting for us down through all the ages until we should be ready to make use of it?"

There ultimate response was favorable.

Dr. VanDam did not mention, and the members being only politicians unable to see beyond the next vote or appointment, did not say:

"True, we do have a theory of how to start and continue the slow-burn nuclear conversion of ordinary rock and dirt to energy. What we do not have, as yet, is a way to stop it.

"We *think* that eventually future man will probably find a way to stop the process. We *think* slow burn will not speed up and run out of control to consume an entire planet before we have found a way to stop it. We *think* that future science may even find a way to decontaminate the planet. We *hope* these things.

"But we *know* that the science of nucleonics will be stillborn and stunted to grow no further unless we go on testing. We convince ourselves that even if an entire planet is consumed, it is a worthless planet anyway, and will be worth it."

Yet there was the usual small minority who questioned our right to destroy one of the planets of the solar system. There is always such a minority, and as always, the rest of the world, intent on turning what it intended to do anyway into the Right-Thing-To-Do, was able to shout them down.

Anyway, the consequences were for future man to face. Or so we thought.

I say we, because I was one of the members of Project Slow-Burn. Not that I'm the hero. There wasn't any hero. Mistaken or not, as it was conceived

this wasn't one of those television spectacles cooked up to convert science into public emotionalism. There was no country-wide search for special photogenic hero-types to front the project.

The reporters, true to their writing tradition of trying to reduce even the most profound scientific achievement to the lowest common denominator of sloppy sentimentalism or avid sensationalism, tried to heroize Dr. VanDam as head of the science side of the project. But he wasn't having any.

"Don't you think, gentlemen," he answered them with acid scorn, "it is about time the public grew up enough to support the search for knowledge because we need it, rather than because they'd like to go to bed with some handsome, brainless kook you've built up into a hero?"

This response was not likely to further the cause of journalism.

They tried to lionize Captain Leyton, as head of the transport side of it; but his remarks were even more unprintable.

They never got down far enough through the echelons of status to reach me. I was Chief of Communications, which is just another way of saying I was a television repairman with headaches. Not that it would have done them any good.

There isn't one thing about me that fits the sentimental notions of what a hero should be. I'm not even a colorful character. If I'm expert in my job it's only because I learned early what any lazy man with an ounce of brains also learns—that life goes easier for the expert than for the ignorant. Which is not exactly the hero attitude the public likes to hear, but true all the same.

I did have an advantage which qualifies me to tell this tale.

Supervision nowadays sits on its duff in an office,

surrounded by television monitors showing them every phase of their responsibilities, and punches buttons when some guy tries to goof off or starts lousing up the operation.

Somebody has to maintain the system and check the same monitors. I saw everything of importance that happened.

That's the only way I come into the yarn at all. I didn't start out a hero type. I didn't turn into one. I just watched what happened; and I got sick at my stomach along with everybody else. And now I slink away, sick and ashamed, and not understanding even that, along with the rest. Not heroes—no, none of us.

From the first this was intended and conducted as a genuine scientific project, a group effort, with each man's ego subdued to serve the needs of the whole. No special heroes emerging to show up the rest of the dopes. None of the usual stuff of romantic fiction was supposed to happen—those unusual dangers, horrible accidents, sudden frightful emergencies so dear to the little sadistic hearts of readers and viewers.

So far as I know, nobody beat up anybody with his fists, nor gunned anyone down, which is the usual, almost the only, fictional way yet found by the humanists for coping with life problems.

We assembled the mastership on the Moon base from parts which were Roman candled up, a few pieces at a time, from too heavily gravitied Earth.

The yelps of pain from taxpayers reached almost as high. It was one thing to wash the hands of the vexing problem of nuclear testing by wanting it shifted out to Mars. It was something else to pay for the project.

Against the Moon's lighter gravity we eventually were space-borne with no more than the usual fight between power thrust and inertia, both physical and psychological.

Without touching that precious reserve of fuel which

we hoped would bring us back again, we were able to build up so much speed that it took us only a month to reach Mars. No point in showing, because nobody would care, how the two dozen of us were cramped in the tiny spaces left by the equipment and instruments we had to carry.

Construction and maintenance had done their job properly, and, for once, inspection had actually done its job, too. We were able to reverse properly at the right time, and soft-cushion powered our way down into a Martian plain eastward of a low range of hills.

Surely everybody has watched the documentaries long enough to have some idea about the incredibly hostile surface of Mars: the too thin air, which lets some stars shine through even in daytime; the waterless desert; the extremes of temperature; the desolation . . .

Ah, the desolation! The terrifying desolation!

Moon surface is bad enough; but at least there is the great ball of Earth, seeming so near in that airless world that one has the illusion of being able to reach out and almost touch it, touch home, know home is still there, imagine he can almost see it.

"See that little tip of land there on the east coast of the North American continent? That's where I live!"

"Yeah," somebody answers. "And who is that guy walking through your front door without knocking while you're away?"

Sometimes it seems that close.

On Mars, Earth is just another bright spot in the black night sky, so far away that the first reaction is one of terrible despair, the overpowering conviction that in all that vast hostility a man will nevermore see home; nor know again the balmy twilight of soft moist summer; nor feel the arms of love.

Explorers had not lied. Nothing, anywhere, could

be more worthless to man than the planet Mars. Worthless, except for the unique purpose which brought us here.

We dug in beneath the surface.

Now surely, again, everyone has seen so many of the documentaries that it is unnecessary to show us digging out our living quarters and laboratories beneath that merciless plain. We used the displaced powdered rock to form a crude cement, not long lasting but adequate for the time we would be there. With it, we surfaced over our living area. This was not so much to provide a landing field, since most of our journeying would be in individual jet-powered space-suits, but to help insure against any leakage of air if our inner seals cracked.

To help seal out the killing radiation we intended to let loose—that, too.

We erected Come-to-me towers at each elevator which would lower space-suited men to lower levels where they could go through locks to reach their quarters. One Come-to-me tower for each half dozen men, tuned to the power source of their suits, to bring each man safely back, as truly as a homing pigeon, to guarantee against their becoming lost on that hostile planet; and, in emergency, should one arise, to see that no panic mob ganged up at one lock and died waiting there for entrance to safety while other locks remained idle—the human way of doing things under stress.

We had to finish all that in the first few weeks before any nuclear tests could be started. Anybody whose notions of science are derived from white-froked actors in television commercials hasn't the vaguest idea of how much back-breaking physical work at the common labor level a genuine scientist has to do.

There was some emotional relief once we had dug

in and sealed out the awful desolation of an uncaring universe. (This is the hardest part of reconciling oneself to the science attitude. More comforting to believe even that the universe is hostile than to admit that it simply doesn't care about man, one way or another.) In our sealed quarters we might briefly imagine ourselves working in an air-conditioned laboratory back home.

It helped. It certainly helped.

Not that I seemed to find time for more than exhausted sleeping there. To see what would be going on at the various field sites where tests were to be run meant the cameras had to be installed at those spots. In spite of the purported rigid tests for expedition personnel, my two assistants must have been somebody's nephews. Somehow each installation seemed to require that I be there.

I was there and usually without some little piece of equipment which would have helped so much, but which had been deleted from the lists we submitted by clerks who were more concerned with making a big showing of how much weight they could eliminate than in helping us.

Somehow we managed.

But I have made a little list of guys I'm going to ferret out and poke in the nose once I get back to Earth. Maybe those Hollywood producers who think the only way to solve a problem is to beat up somebody or gun him down have something, after all. Right on top of that list, in big bold letters, is the spacesuit designer who thinks a man can handle the incredibly fine parts of miniaturized electronic equipment with those crude instruments they give us to screw into the arm ends of spacesuits.

Somehow we managed. Somehow, out of chaos, order came. Somehow tests got made. Sometimes the theories worked; sometimes, more often, there was

only the human sigh, the gulp, the shrug, and back to the drawing board.

Big surprise at the end of the first three months. A supply ship landed. Mostly food and some champagne, yet! Stuff the folks back home thought they'd like to have if they were out here. Even some pin-up pictures, as if we weren't already having enough trouble without being reminded. But none of the equipment we'd radioed for in case the taxpayers could forego a drink and a cigarette apiece to raise money for sending it. The public couldn't understand our need for equipment, so they didn't send any. Miracles aren't supposed to need any equipment or effort; they just come into being because people want them.

The packages of home-baked cookies were welcome enough after our diet of hydroponic algae, but I'd still rather have had a handful of miniature transistors.

Some of the guys said they'd have been willing to substitute their cookies for an equal weight of big, buxom blonde; but that's something the cookie bakers probably preferred not to think about.

The little three-man crew of the supply ship promised, as they were taking off for their return journey, they'd tell 'em what we really wanted when they got back, but I doubt the message ever got broadcast over the home and family television sets. Anyway, scientists are supposed to be cold, unfeeling, inhuman creatures who wander around looking noble, wise, and above it all.

In the beginning I'd thought that once I got the heavy work of installation completed, I could do a little wandering around myself, looking wise and noble. No such luck. I'd no more than get set up to show one experiment than it was over; and I'd have to dismantle, move, and set up for another. We'd thought the lighter gravity of Mars, 38 percent, would

make the labor easy. But somehow there was still lifting, tugging, pulling, hauling, cursing.

But then, nobody wants to hear how the scientist has to work to get his miracle. The whole essence is the illusion that miracles can be had without work, that all one needs is to wish.

All right. So we'll get to the miracle.

Now we were finally ready to get down to the real test, the main reason for our coming out to Mars—Project Slow-Burn.

VanDam chose a little pocket at the center of that little cluster of hills to our West—that little cluster of hills everybody has seen in the pictures radioed back to Earth.

We didn't know it at the time, but that little cluster of hills was causing quite an uproar among archeologists back home. No archeologists had been included in the expedition, and now they were beating their breasts because from the pictures those hills looked mighty artificial to them. There was too much of a hint that the hills might once have been pyramids, they said, incredibly ancient, perhaps weathered down eons ago when the planet was younger, before it had lost so much of its atmosphere, but maybe still containing something beneath them.

We didn't hear the uproar, of course. Administration deemed it unnecessary for us to bother our pretty little heads about such nonsense. In fact the uproar never got outside the academic cloister to reach the public at all. Administration should have listened. But then, when does man listen to what might interfere with his plans and spoil something?

We got all set to go in that little pocket at the center of the hills. The spot was ideal for us because the hill elevations gave us an opportunity to place our cameras on their tops to focus down into the crater we hoped would appear.

A whole ring of cameras was demanded. The physicists seemed to share too much of the public's attitude that all I needed to produce enough equipment was to wish for it. But by stripping the stuff from virtually every other project, I managed to balance the demands of the Slow-Burn crew against the outraged screams of the side-issue scientists.

VanDam's theories worked.

At first it took the instruments to detect that there was any activity; but gradually, even crude human eyes could see there was a hole beginning to appear, deepen and spread—progressively.

It was out of my line, but the general idea seemed to be that only one molecular layer at a time was affected, and that it, in turn, activated the next beneath and to the side while its own electrons and protons gave up their final energy.

The experiment did not work perfectly. The process should have been complete. There should have been no by-product of smoke and fire, no sign to human eyes of anything happening except a slowly deepening and spreading hole in the ground.

Instead there was some waste of improperly consumed molecules, resulting in an increasingly heavy, fire-laced smoke which arose sluggishly in the thin air, borne aloft only by its heat, funneling briefly while it gave up that heat. Then it settled down and contaminated everything it touched. To compound my troubles, of course.

The physicists were griping their guts out because I didn't have the proper infra-red equipment to penetrate the smoke; and somehow I wasn't smart enough to snap my fingers and—abracadabra—produce. Those damned cookie packages instead of equipment! Those damned clerks who had decided what we wouldn't need. My little list was getting longer.

Still, I guess I was able to get a feeble little snap

from my fingers. I did manage to convert some stuff, never intended for that purpose, into infra-red penetration. We managed to see down into that smoke-and fire-filled crater.

To see enough.

It was the middle of a morning (somebody who still cared claimed it would be a Tuesday back home) some three basic weeks after the beginning of the experiment. The hole was now some thirty feet across and equally deep, growing faster than VanDam's figures predicted it should, but still not running wild and out of control. Even if it had been, we couldn't have stopped it. We didn't know how.

I was trying to work out a little cleaner fix on the south wall of the crater when that wall disappeared like the side of a soap bubble. My focus was sharp enough to see.

To see down and into that huge, vaulted room. To see the living Martians in that room shrivel, blacken, writhe and die. To see some priceless, alien works of art writhe and blacken and curl; some burst into flame; some shatter unto dust.

That was when the scientists, sitting there watching their monitors with horror-stricken eyes, felt jubilation replaced with terrible guilt.

I, too. For naturally I was watching the master monitors to see that the equipment kept working. I saw it all.

I saw those miniature people, yes people, whole and beautiful, in one brief instant blacken, writhe and die.

Out of the billions of gross people on Earth, once in a generation a tiny midget is born and matures to such perfection in proportion and surpassing beauty that the huge, coarse, normal person can only stare and marvel—and remember the delicate perfection of that miniature being with nostalgic yearning for the rest of his life.

From such, perhaps, come the legends common to all peoples in all ages, of the fairies. Or, eons ago, was there traffic between Earth and Mars? Or even original colonization from Mars to Earth, finally mutating into giants? They were people, miniatures of ourselves.

I saw them there. Perhaps not more than a dozen in that room. But in other rooms? Perhaps in a lace-work of underground rooms? A whole civilization which, like ourselves on Mars, had gone underground, sealed themselves in against the thinning atmosphere, the dying planet?

And we had begun the atomic destruction of their planet. We had begun it. We could not stop it. The corrosion keeps growing, spreading.

I saw them die. Somehow I felt their pain.

But I did not die of it.

I carry it with me. I shall always carry it with me.

That's all there is.

In years to come people on Earth, people who did not see what we saw, did not feel the pain and guilt we felt, will wonder at our behavior following that.

Oh there is much to wonder. If there is a civilization, where does their food come from? If they are able to convert rock to food, why are they not able to stop the atomic destruction of their planet we have started? If they are able to fill us with such grief that we can think of nothing but to slink away, like whipped curs caught in vandalism, why didn't they do this before we started the fire we cannot stop?

Oh, there is so much unanswered. People will wonder at the fact that we simply abandoned most of our equipment, the very project itself; that for a sick hour we watched, then, with one accord, without anybody making the decision, we began to withdraw and start for home.

Like small boys, thinking only to vandalize a school-house in their savage glee, discovering it is a shrine.

Or, perhaps in time, we can rationalize it all away. Perhaps so soon as during that long, journey back.

It wasn't our fault, we shall begin to say. They were as much to blame as we. Sure they were!

More to blame! They were more to blame than we!

Why didn't they come out of their holes and fight us? With their fists if they didn't have any guns? *Any* red-bloodied—er, red-blooded—Amuri—well, whatever they are—ought to have enough guts to come out and fight, to defend home, flag and mother!

We'll probably get around to that. It's the normal attitude to take after vandalism. It's the human way.

But as of now, our only thought is to slink away.

On our abandoned Martian landing field there hangs a man's discarded spacesuit, suspended from the desensitized prongs of a Come-to-me tower. It is stuffed with straw filched, no doubt, from packing cases which brought out so many more delicate, sensitive, precision instruments than we take back.

Although we have not been entirely irresponsible in our head-long flight back home.

We do bring back some of what we took out: the more valuable of the instruments. We have been most selective in this.

The only coarse, insensitive, unfinished instrument we bring back—is man.



# THE WEATHER MAN

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BY THEODORE L. THOMAS (1920- )

ANALOG

JUNE

*Theodore L. Thomas is a chemical engineer and attorney from my wife's hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who over the last 35 years or so has produced over 50 short stories of generally excellent quality and two good novels (both with Kate Wilhelm)—The Clone and The Year Of The Cloud (both 1968). Among his best short fiction is "December 28th," "The Doctor," "Early Bird" (with Ted Cogswell), "The Far Look," and "Satellite Passage." Around 10 stories, all featuring a Patent attorney, and all very funny, were written as by "Leonard Lockhard." He richly deserves a collection.*

*"The Weather Man" may be the best story ever written about the control and manipulation of climate, a practice that may be just around the century.*

*" . . . And the name 'Weather Bureau' continued to be used, although the organization itself was somewhat changed in form. Thus the Weather Congress consisted of three arms. First was the political arm, the Weather Council. Second was the scientific arm, the Weather Advisors. Third was the operating arm, the*

Weather Bureau. All three arms were relatively independent, and each . . .”

THE COLUMBIA ENCYCLOPEDIA, 32nd Edition  
Columbia University Press

Jonathan H. Wilburn opened his eyes and immediately felt the tension in the day. He lay there, puzzled, seeking the source of it. It was the start of just another day in Palermo. The street noises were normal, his apartment was quiet, and he felt good. That was it. He felt good, very good, full of vigor and strong of mind, and with the feeling that he was ready for anything that might happen.

In one movement he threw back the cover and rolled to his feet alongside the bed. Not bad for a man who had turned fifty last week. He stepped into the shower and dissolved his pajamas into a rich foam of cleansing lather. He dried and stood motionless in the center of his dressing room. The tension and the excitement were still with him. He depilated and dressed, and as he slipped into his jacket it came to him.

Sometime during the night in his sleep he had made up his mind that the time had come for him to make a move. He was fifty years old, he had carefully built a good reputation, and he had come as far as he could in the normal course of events. It was now time to push, time to take a chance. To reach the top in politics you have to take a chance.

Wilburn finished slipping into his jacket. He bared his teeth at himself in the mirror. Now he knew why the day felt different. But knowing the reason did nothing to diminish the tension. He would live with it from now on; this he knew for a certainty. He would live with and work on the tips of his toes, looking for a way to seize the god of luck and give him a good ringing out.

For a quarter of a century he had moved cautiously, planning each move, insuring its success before he committed himself to it. Slowly he had climbed through the tiers of politics, the House, the Senate, the United Nations, an ambassadorship, several emergency chairmanships, and finally, the most elite of all bodies, the Weather Congress. His reputation was made, he was known as a brilliant, affable diplomat, one with high skill at bringing about agreement among other hostile Councilmen. He had built a strong following among the two hundred members in the Weather Council. But in politics as in everything else, the higher one climbs, the tougher the advancement. Wilburn suddenly came to the realization that he had not made any advancements in four years. Then came his fiftieth birthday.

Jonathan Wilburn ate breakfast with his wife that morning. Harriet was a slim woman, quietly wise in her role of the wife of a member of the Council of the Weather Congress. In one quick glance she saw that her husband was tight as a wire, and she touched the Diner and placed coffee in front of him. While he sipped it she touched out a set of onion-flavored eggs and carefully hand-basted them with the pork sauce he loved so much; she did not trust the Diner to do it right. While she worked she chatted about the news in the morning paper. Wilburn ate his breakfast, part listening, part smiling and grunting responses, and part staring into space. He kissed her good-by then, and went out and stepped on a walk.

He rode the walk through the soft Sicilian air, and then became impatient with standing still. He stepped off the walk and strode alongside, and he felt pleased at the way his legs stretched. Off in the distance he could see the dome of the main Council building, and it brought his mind back to the problem at hand. But, even as he thought it, he knew it was nothing he could

reason out in advance. This was something he would have to pick up on the spur of the moment. And he would have to stay alert to recognize it when it came.

Wilburn stepped back on the walk and rode it to the Council.

He entered the Great Hall by the north stairs and walked along the east wall toward the stairs to his office. A group of sight-seers were being guided across the Great Hall by a uniformed guide, and the guide was describing the wonders of the Hall. When the guide saw Wilburn coming, he interrupted his lecture to say, "And coming toward us from our left is Councilman Wilburn of an eastern United States District of whom you have all heard and who will play such an important part in the vote today to reduce the water available to northern Australia."

The sight-seers stopped, stumbling into one another at the unexpected appearance of such a celebrity. Wilburn smiled and waved at them, and this confounded them even more, but he did not stop to talk. He knew from the guide's remarks that none of his constituents were in the group; the guide would have contrived to warn him so that he could act accordingly. Wilburn smiled to himself—an officeholder had many advantages over a mere candidate for office.

Wilburn turned to the stairs and rode up with Councilman Georges DuBois, of middle Europe. DuBois said, "I heard him. Decided yet how you are to vote on this Australian situation, Jonathan?"

"I lean toward an aye, but I don't know. Do you?"

DuBois shook his head. "I feel the same. It is a thing we should do only with the greatest of caution. It is a terrible thing to make men suffer, and even worse to do it to women and children. I don't know."

They rode in silence to the top of the stairs, and just before they parted Wilburn said, "My wife stands with me in everything *I* do, George."

DuBois looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, and then said, "Yes, I understand you. The women there are as much to blame as the men, and deserve punishment as much. Yes, that will help me if I vote aye. I will see you in Council." They nodded good-by to each other in a wordless gesture of mutual respect and understanding. DuBois was one of the thoughtful Councilmen who knew better than most the fearful responsibility carried by the political arm of the Weather Congress.

Wilburn nodded to his staff as he passed through the outer office. Once at his desk he swiftly settled down to take care of the many chores. The small pile of papers stacked neatly in the center of his desk melted away as he picked up one after another, dictated the words that disposed of it, and dropped it on another pile.

He was just finishing when a gentle masculine voice said through the speaker, "Have you time to see a friend?"

Wilburn smiled, and got up to open the door of his office for Councilman Gardner Tongareva. The two men smiled and shook hands, and Tongareva settled back deep into one of Wilburn's chairs. He was a yellow-skinned man, a Polynesian, wrinkled and old and wise. His trousers were full and short, reminiscent of the sarong worn by his ancestors. His hair was white and his face was warm and kindly. Tongareva was one of those rare men whose mere presence brought smiles to the faces of his companions and peace to their hearts. He was a man of enormous influence in the Council solely by virtue of his personality.

His district was 15-30 degrees north latitude 150-165 degrees east longitude, the same fifteen-degree-on-a-side landed area of the Earth as the District of

each of the other Councilmen. But in Tongareva's case the land was vanishingly small. The only land in the entire region was Marcus Island, one square mile in area, and supporting exactly four people. This was quite a contrast with the 100 million people living in Wilburn's District of 30-45 degrees north latitude 75-90 degrees west longitude. Yet time after time when the population-weighted votes of the two hundred Councilmen were counted, it was apparent that Tongareva had swayed a large percentage of the entire globe.

Wilburn leaned back in his chair and said to Tongareva, "Have you reached a decision yet about the Australian drought?"

Tongareva nodded. "Yes, I have. I believe we have no choice but to subject them to a year's drought. Naughty children must be spanked, and for two years these people have persisted in maintaining an uneven balance of trade. What is really involved here, Jonathan, is a challenge to the supreme authority of the Weather Congress over the peoples of the world. These people in Queensland and the Northern Territory are a hardy lot. They don't really believe that we can or will chastise them by controlling their weather to their detriment. They must be punished immediately or other sections of the world will begin acting up, too. At this time a simple drought to take away their lush prosperity for a year ought to serve. Later it might become necessary to make them suffer, and none of us wants that. Yes, Jonathan, my vote will be cast in favor of the Australian drought."

Wilburn nodded soberly. He saw now that the vote almost certainly would be in favor of punishment. Most of the Councilmen seemed to feel it was necessary, but were reluctant to cause suffering. But when Tongareva stated his position as he just had, the reluctance would be put aside. Wilburn said, "I agree with

you, Gardner. You have put into words the thoughts of most of us in this matter. I will vote with you."

Tongareva said nothing, but he continued to stare sharply at Wilburn. It was not a discomfiting stare; nothing Tongareva did was ever discomfiting. Tongareva said, "You are a different man this morning, my good friend. Just as you have been still a different man for the last three weeks. You have resolved whatever it is that has been disturbing you, and I am pleased. No," he raised a hand as Wilburn was about to speak, "it is quite unnecessary to discuss it. When you want me, I will be there to help you." He stood up. "And now I must go to discuss the Australian situation with some of the others." He smiled and left before Wilburn could say anything.

Wilburn stared after him, awed at the enormous ability of Tongareva to understand what he had been going through. He shook his head and gathered himself and then went out into his waiting room to talk to the dozen people who were waiting to see him.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting," he said to all of them, "but things are hectic around the Council this morning, as I guess you know. Please forgive me for not seeing each of you alone, but we will be summoned for Council business in a few minutes. I did not want to miss the chance to see all of you for a moment or two at least. Perhaps we can get together this afternoon or tomorrow morning."

And Wilburn moved around the room shaking hands and fixing in his mind the name of each visitor. Two of them were not constituents. They were lobbyists representing the northern Australian Districts, and they launched into a tirade against the taking of any punitive action against the Districts.

Wilburn held up his hand and said, "Gentlemen, this topic may not be discussed under these circum-

stances. I will listen to the arguments for and against on the floor of the Council, nowhere else. That is all." He smiled and began to pass on. The younger of the two seized his arm and turned him to face him, saying, "But Councilman you must listen. These poor people are being made to suffer for the acts of a few of their leaders. You cannot—"

Wilburn shrugged away from the restraining arm, stepped swiftly to the wall and pressed a button there. The lobbyist turned pale and said, "Oh, now, Councilman, I meant no harm. Please do not lodge a protest against me. Please—"

Two men in the uniform of the Weather Congress swept in the outer door. Wilburn's voice was calm and his face impassive, but his eyes glinted like ice crystals. He pointed and said to the guards, "This man grabbed my arm to try to force me to listen to his arguments on Council business. I lodge a protest against him."

It all happened so fast the rest of the visitors had difficulty recalling exactly what had happened. But the recording tapes showed, and Wilburn knew that the lobbyist would never again be allowed in the halls of the Weather Congress. The two guards softly hustled him out of the room. The other lobbyist said, "I am sorry, Councilman. I feel responsible for his conduct; he is new."

Wilburn nodded and started to speak, but a low musical chime sounded repeatedly in the room. Wilburn said to the visitors, "Please excuse me. I must go to the Council Floor now. If you wish, you may watch the proceedings from the Visitor's Auditorium. Thank you for coming up to see me, and I hope we can talk more another time." He waved and smiled and went back into his office.

Hurriedly he checked his staff to see that they were ready for the day's business. All were in position, all knew their roles in the coming debate. Wilburn then

took the belt to the Floor, walking the last hundred yards out in the public hall where he could be seen. As he came to the main doors several newspapermen asked permission to approach, but he refused; he wanted to get to his desk early and start work.

He went through the doors and down the short wide hall that led to the Floor. He came out into the huge room and went down the main aisle toward his desk. A few Councilmen were already there, and as the Recorder called off Wilburn's name, they looked up and waved at him. He waved back and continued on his way to his high-seniority desk up front. He sat down and began flipping the buttons and switches that put him in touch with everything that was going on. Immediately a light glowed indicating that one of the seated Councilmen wanted to talk to him. Councilman Hardy of 165-180 west longitude 30-45 south latitude—containing most of New Zealand—said to him, "Well, Jonathan, have you talked with Tongareva yet?"

"Yes, George, I have."

"Going to vote the way he wants?"

"Yes, although I want to wait and hear what is said in opposition before I finally make up my mind. Where do you stand?"

There was a perceptible pause, then, "I will probably vote against it, unless someone expresses the extreme reluctance of the Council to vote for drought."

"Why don't you do it, George?"

"Maybe I will. Thank you, Jonathan." And he cut the circuit.

Wilburn looked around the huge chamber, and as always, he became a little awed at what he saw. It was more than the impressive array of the two hundred huge desks, the raised President's chair, the great

board that showed the weather at the moment on every part of the Earth's surface, and the communications rooms set off from the main room. There was an aura about this great chamber that was felt by all the men and women who entered it, whether to work in it or simply to visit. The fate of the Earth was centered here, and had been for fifty years. From this chamber flowed the decisions that controlled the world.

The Weather Congress was the supreme body of Earth, able to bend states, nations, continents, and hemispheres to its will. What dictator, what country, could survive when no drop of rain fell for a year? Or what dictator, what country could survive when blanketed under fifty feet of snow and ice? The Weather Congress could freeze the Congo River or dry up the Amazon. It could flood the Sahara or Tierra del Fuego. It could thaw the tundra, and raise and lower the levels of the oceans at will. And here, in this chamber, all the political decisions had been made, and the chamber seemed to acquire some of the feeling that had been expressed over the last half century, from the stormy early days, to the more settled and reflective present. It was a powerful chamber, and it made its power felt by those who sat in it.

A great many Councilmen had seated themselves. Another chime sounded, and the weather requests began to be relayed to the Councilmen. The Recorder read off the requests, and his voice reached each desk through a tiny speaker. At the same time the written request flashed on the big board. In this manner the Councilmen could busy themselves with other duties while keeping an eye on the requests.

The first request, as usual, came from the Lovers of the Lowly Cactus Plant, and they wanted less rainfall and more desolation in Death Valley to keep the Barrel Cactus from becoming extinct.

Wilburn rang Tongareva's desk and said, "How many have you talked to, Gardner?"

"About forty, Jonathan. I caught a large group having a cup of coffee."

"Have you talked to Maitland?"

There was a perceptible pause. Maitland seemed always to be against anything Wilburn stood for. His District was 60-75 west longitude 30-45 north latitude, adjoining Wilburn's and including New York City and Boston. Maitland always made it plain that he considered Wilburn unfit for the position of influence he held in the Council. "No," said Tongareva, and Wilburn could see him shake his great head, "no, I did not talk to Maitland."

Wilburn signed off, and listened and watched. The president of Bolivia complained that the region around Cochabamba was running a little too cool to suit his taste. The mayor of Avigait in Greenland stated that the corn crop was ten percent lower this year due to an extra two inches of rainfall and too much cloud cover. Wilburn nodded; there was one that should be treated seriously, and he pushed a button on his desk marked "favorable" to insure that it would be considered by the entire Council.

His phone rang. It was a constituent asking him to address the Combined Rotary Club at their annual meeting October 27th next. The clear light flashed as Wilburn's staff, monitoring and checking everything, indicated that he was free on that day. "Why, thank you, yes," said Wilburn, accepting the invitation. "I shall be grateful for the chance to talk to your group." He knew he had made no address in that region for a year, and it was high time. Probably his staff had subtly set it up in the first place.

A farmer outside of Gatrún, Libya, wanted his neighbor's water cut back so that all their crops would be the same height.

Then a conference was called among half a dozen Councilmen to discuss the order of speeches on the Australian situation. While they worked this out, Wilburn noted a request from Ceylon to be allowed to go over from rice in the inland sections to wheat, with the attendant reduction in rainfall and average temperature. He pushed the "favorable" button.

It was decided that George DuBois, of Middle Europe, should introduce the drought resolution, with appropriately reluctant language.

One George Andrews of Holtville, California, wanted to see snow fall again before he died, which would be in a few weeks now, no matter that it was July. He could not leave the semitropical environment of Holtville.

Tongareva would second the resolution, and then they would hear the Councilmen from the Australian Districts present their reasons why the punishment should not be instituted. After that they would play it by ear.

The seaport city of Stockholm requested an additional fifteen centimeters of elevation for the Baltic Sea. Kobdo, Mongolia, complained that there had been two disastrous avalanches due to the extra snow burden. And it was there that the hairs on the back of Wilburn's neck began to prickle.

He stiffened in his seat and looked around to see the source of the strange sensation. The floor bustled with activity, all of it normal. He stood up, but he could see nothing more. He saw Tongareva looking over at him. He shrugged his shoulders and sat down and stared at the barrage of lights on his desk. His skin almost crawled and the adrenalin poured into his veins and he felt wildly exhilarated. What was it? He grabbed the edge of the desk and closed his eyes and forced himself to think. He blanked out all the activity

around him and forced his mind to relax and find the source of the stimulation. Australian problem? No, not that. It was . . . it was something in the weather requests. He opened his eyes, and pushed the playback button and watched the requests again.

One by one, more quickly now, they flashed on the miniature screen on his desk. Avalanches, Baltic Sea level, snow in southern California, Ceylon's rice to wheat, the Libyan farmer, the— Wait. He had it now, so he turned back to it and read it very slowly.

George Andrews of Holtville, California, wanted to see snow fall again before he died soon, and he would be unable to leave the semitropical environment of southern California. The more Wilburn stared at it, the more it seemed to have everything he needed. It had universal appeal: a dying man with a final request. It would be difficult: snow in July in southern California was unheard of; he wasn't even certain that it could be carried out. It was almost completely irrational; the Council had never bothered with such requests in the past. The more Wilburn looked at it, the more he became convinced he had found the proper cause on which to risk his career. People the world over would be behind him if he could bring it off. He remembered how it had been in the tradition of American presidents to show an occasional high concern over some unimportant individual. If he failed, he would probably be finished in politics, but that was the chance to take. And there was something about that name George Andrews, something that set off a vague, disturbing memory in the back of his mind, something that had attracted him to the request in the first place. No matter. It was time for him to call up for action all the forces he could muster.

He cut his entire staff into his circuit and cut all others out. He said, "I am considering supporting the George Andrews request." He paused to allow the

statement to sink in, smiling to himself at the shock to his staff; never had they heard of anything so wild from him. "Check out everything you can about George Andrews. Make certain that his request is bona fide and isn't some sort of trap for an innocent Councilman like me. In particular, make certain that no connection exists between George Andrews and Councilman Maitland. Check with Greenberg in the Advisors as to the chances of coming up with a solution to the problem of snow in July in southern California in an extremely restricted region. Given that answer, check with the Bureau, probably Hechmer—he's up on the sun right now—and see what the chances are of carrying it out. This must be completed in . . . just a moment." Wilburn looked around him. The weather requests had ended, and Councilman Yardley had left his desk and was walking toward the front of the Floor to assume his role as President. "You have four hours to get all the information. Go, and good luck. We will all need it this time." And Wilburn sat back. There was no time to relax, however.

Calls had piled up while he had set the investigation in motion. He began clearing them as President Yardley called the Council to order, swiftly dispensed with the old business, and then brought up the matter of the censure of Australia. Wilburn kept an ear on the transactions on the Floor as he continued to handle the incoming calls and other demands on his time. The President stated the order of the speeches for and against the drought resolution, and the Council sat back to listen. Councilman DuBois made his preliminary remarks, expressing the deep and abiding regret that the Council found it necessary in this manner to uphold the principles of the Weather Congress. It was a good speech, thought Wilburn. There could be no doubt of DuBois' sincerity, and when he solemnly

stated the resolution itself, there were tears in his eyes, and his voice shook. Then the first of the Councilmen from Australia got up to argue against the resolution.

Wilburn pocketed the portable receiver, punched the button that showed he was listening via receiver, and left the floor. Many other Councilmen did the same, most of them heading for the Councilmen's Closed Restaurant where they could have a cup of coffee without having to deal with constituents, the press, lobbyists, or any of a multitude of organizations. They sipped their coffee and nibbled sweet cakes and talked. The conversation was all on the coming vote, and it was easy to see that opinion was hardening in favor of the resolution. The Councilmen talked in low voices so they could follow the trend of the arguments being made back on the floor; each Councilman had his portable receiver with him and each listened through the bone microphone behind an ear. The talk grew louder as it became apparent that the Australian Councilman was advancing nothing more than the same old arguments, don't-cause-suffering and give-us-another-chance. The vote was now almost a certainty.

Wilburn wandered back to the floor and handled some more of the day's business at his desk. He went out for more coffee, and returned. He rose to make a brief speech in favor of the resolution, expressing regret for the necessity. Then, as the arguments pro and con began to draw toward the end, the information on George Andrews began to come in.

George Andrews was one hundred and twenty-six years old with a heart condition, and the doctors had given him six weeks to live. There was no discernible connection between Andrews and Councilman Mait-

land. Wilburn interrupted to ask, "Who checked on that?"

"Jack Parker," was the answer, and Wilburn heard a slight chuckle, which he forgave. Jack Parker was one of the keenest investigators in the business, and Wilburn noted to himself that the staff member who had thought of putting Parker on that particular investigation was due for a bonus. At least Wilburn could now make a decision without fear of walking into a political trap of some kind. But the report continued.

"As I guess you know, Andrews came very close to being one of the most famous men in the world a hundred years ago. For a while it looked like Andrews would get credit for inventing the sessile boats, but he was finally beaten by Hans Daggensnurf. There used to be a few people around who insisted that Andrews was the real inventor all along, and that dirty politics, shrewd lawyers, unethical corporations, and filthy money combined to make a goat out of him. The name 'sessile boats' was Andrews' name for the sun boats, and the name has stuck. But then, you could never have called them Daggensnurf boats."

Wilburn remembered now, awed that his subconscious mind should have somehow alerted him to the need to check out the name George Andrews. Andrews had been the George Seldon of the automobile industry, the William Kelly of the so-called Bessemer steel process. All were forgotten men; someone else reaped the immortality. In Andrews' case, he had, according to some, been the man who invented the sun boats, those marvelous devices that made the entire Weather Congress possible. Sliding on a thin film of gaseous carbon, the sessile boats safely traversed the hell of the sun's surface, moving from place to place to stir up the activity needed to produce the desired weather. Without the sessile boats there would be no Weather Bureau staffed by lean, hard-eyed

men, working the sun to produce the results called for by the Weather Council. Yes, Wilburn was lucky indeed to have dragged out his piece of ancient history just when he needed it.

The report continued, "We checked with the Weather Advisors, particularly Bob Greenberg. He says there is a fair chance they can find a way to pull snow in southern California this time of year, but he's not guaranteeing anything. One of his people has the beginnings of a new theory that might just work, and our request might be the one to test it out. But he doesn't want to be quoted on any of this. He's got a personnel problem with the genius who would do the work if our request was official. I gathered he would like for us to push it through so he could settle things one way or the other with this bright-eyed genius."

Wilburn asked, "How about the Bureau?"

"Well, we talked to Hechmer as you suggested. It is his tour on the sun right now, so he's in close touch. He says they've only got one Boat Master in the entire Bureau with enough guts and imagination, and he's having some kind of trouble at home. But Hechmer says if we come up with something special, he'll find a way to make his man produce."

Wilburn listened to many other details relating to the Andrews situation. His first assistant had added a feature of his own to the investigation, one which showed why he was such a highly paid member of Wilburn's staff. He had supervised a quiet opinion survey to find how Wilburn's constituents would react to his sponsoring a motion to grant Andrews' request. The result was predictable: If the request went through quickly and smoothly, and if the snow fell, Wilburn would be a wise, humane, and generous man. If acrimony developed in a debate and if snow did not fall, Wilburn would be a man who had blundered badly.

\* \* \*

The report ended. Wilburn cleared his desk of all activity and took a quick look out at the floor. The debate was winding up. The Councilmen were visibly restless to get on to the voting, and it was now clear that the vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the resolution calling for a drought. Wilburn sat back to think.

But even as he sat back he knew the answer; there was really no need to make a decision here. He was going to do it. The only question was: How? And as he turned his mind to the timing of presenting his motion, he saw that here and now was the time. When better than right at the time the Council was finishing an unpleasant piece of business? He might be able to slip his motion through to help take the unpleasant taste from the mouths of the Councilmen. That was it. Wilburn sat back to wait the vote. In another ten minutes it started.

And in twenty minutes it was over. The vote in favor of the drought resolution was 192 to 8. The President lifted his gavel to adjourn the session, Wilburn stood up.

"Mr. President," he said, "we have just had to carry out a necessary but unpleasant duty. I now wish to move that the Council carry out an unnecessary but pleasant duty. I respectfully direct the attention of the honorable members to Weather Request Number 18, today's date."

He paused while the members, looking puzzled, punched the button on their desks that would play back for them the Andrews' request. Wilburn waited until he saw most of the faces turned toward him in disbelief. Then he said, "I just said that our duty in this matter was unnecessary, but in a larger sense we have never had a more necessary duty in conscience to see that justice . . ." And Wilburn stated his case for Andrews. He briefly traced the history of George

Andrews' career, and the debt owed him by the human race, a debt that had never been paid. As he talked, Wilburn smiled to himself at the phone calls he knew were racing from desk to desk on the Floor. "What's got into Jonathan?" "Has Wilburn lost his mind?" "Watch yourself on this one; he's up to something."

Wilburn stated the difficulty of knowing for certain whether the request was even within the realm of technological possibility. Only the Weather Advisors could tell. And even if it were possible, the Bureau might not be able to carry it out. But such considerations should not stop the Council from trying. And he concluded with an impassioned plea for this act of grace to show the world that the Council was made up of men who never lost sight of the individual.

He sat down amidst silence. Then Tongareva rose, and with soft words and gentle manner he supported the resolution, emphasizing the warmth and humanity of the motion at a time when there would be many who thought the Council too harsh. He sat down, and Maitland rose to the Floor. To Wilburn's astonishment, Maitland, too, supported the resolution. But as Wilburn listened, he understood that Maitland supported the resolution only because he saw disaster in it for Wilburn. It took nerve for Maitland to do it. He could not know what Wilburn had in mind, but Maitland was willing to trust his judgment that a mistake had been made and to try to capitalize on it.

Wilburn answered all the incoming calls from his fellow Councilmen, all of whom wanted to know if Wilburn wanted them to rise in support of the motion. Some of these were his friends, others were those who owed him a favor. To all of them Wilburn urged support in the form of a brief supporting speech. For forty minutes Councilmen bobbed up, spoke for a moment, and then sat down. When the vote came, it

was one of the few unanimous votes in the history of the Council. The Australian drought was forgotten, both on the floor and on the video screens of the world. All thoughts were turned to the little town of Holtville, California.

Wilburn heard the gavel adjourn the session, and he knew he was fully committed. His fate was in the hands of others; his work was done for now, possibly forever.

But after all, if one wants to reach the top in politics, one has to take a chance.

Anna Brackney wandered up the broad steps of the Weather Advisors Building half an hour early, as usual. At the top she stopped and looked out over the city of Stockholm. It was a pretty city, sturdy under its heavy roofs, sparkling under the early morning sun, and quiet and restful. Stockholm was a fine place for the Advisors. In fact it was such an excellent choice for the kind of work the Advisors did, Anna wondered all over again how it was possible for men to have chosen it. She turned and went in.

The Maintenance Supervisor, Hjalmar Froding, directed the Polishing Machine around the lobby. He saw Anna Brackney and immediately guided the Machine to lay down a tic-tac-toe pattern in wax on the floor, and then he bowed to her. She stopped, put her finger in her mouth, and then pointed to the upper right-hand square. The Machine put an "O" on it, and then placed an "X" in the center square for Froding. The game went on until Froding had three "Xs" in a row, and the Machine triumphantly ran a straight line through them. Hjalmar Froding bowed to Anna Brackney, and she bowed to him and went on her way. She ignored the escalator and walked up the stairs, feeling pleased that she again was able to have Froding win in an unobvious manner. Anna Brackney

was fond of Froding; he seldom spoke or smiled, and treated her as if she were the queen of Sweden. It was too bad some of the other men around here couldn't be guided as simply.

She had to pass through the main Weather Room on her way to her office. A great globe of the world occupied the center of the room, and it showed the weather at the moment on every part of the Earth. The globe was similar in purpose to the map in the Weather Council, but it had a few additional features. Every jet stream, density variation, inversion, every front, isobar, isallobar, isotherm, precipitation area, clouded area, and air mass showed on the globe. The globe was a mass of shifting colors, undecipherable to the untrained eye, making sense only to the mathematicians who made up the technical staff of the Advisors. The curved walls of the room were covered with the instruments that made up the Weather Net, the senses of the Advisors. The entire room looked like something out of a nightmare with its seething globe and dancing lights and shimmering dials. Anna walked through without notice with the callousness of long proximity. She headed for the private wire from the Weather Council to see if that strange request had come in yet.

The guard in the Council Communications room saluted and stepped aside for her. She went in and sat down and began to flip through the night's messages from the Council. She picked up the one that related to the imposition of a drought in northern Australia, and read it. She snorted when she finished, and said aloud to herself, "Nothing, no problem at all. A child could figure out how to bring that about." And on down the stack of messages she went.

She found it and read it carefully, and read it again. It was just as the news flashes had reported: Snow in July on a one-square-mile area in southern California.

The latitude and the longitude of the area were given, and that was all there was to it. But Anna Brackney felt the excitement grow within her. Here was the nastiest problem to confront the Advisors in decades, one that probably could not be solved by standard techniques. She put her finger in her mouth. Here was what she had been waiting for, the chance to prove out her theory. Now all she had to do was convince Greenberg to give her the problem. She restacked the messages and went to her office.

It was a small office measuring about eight by eight feet, but Anna Brackney still thought it too big. Her desk was in one corner facing one wall to give her the illusion of being more cramped than she really was. Anna could not stand the feeling of open spaces when she worked. There was no window, no picture on any of the walls, nothing distracting against the plain dark gray walls. Other Advisors had different ideas on the proper working environment. Some used bright splashes of color, others used woodland or ocean scenes, Greenberg had his walls covered with a black and white maze, and Hiromaka's walls were covered with nudes. Anna shuddered with disgust as she thought of it.

Instead of sitting at her desk, she stood in the middle of the small room, thinking of how she could persuade Greenberg to assign the Andrews problem to her. This would be hard. She knew that Greenberg did not like her, and she knew it was only because he was a man and she was a woman. None of the men liked her, and as a result her work never received the credit it deserved. A woman in a man's world was never allowed to be judged on the basis of her work alone. But if she could get the Andrews problem, she would show them. She would show them all.

But time was short. The Andrews problem had to

be solved immediately. Sometimes the Advisors' weather programs took weeks to put into operation, and if this turned out to be one like that it would be too late. It had to be worked on and solved now to see if there was enough time. She spun on her heels and ran out of the office and down the escalator to the wide steps at the front door of the building. She would waste no time. She would meet Greenberg as he came in.

She had a ten-minute wait, and Greenberg was early at that. Anna Brackney pounced on him as he reached the top step. She said, "Dr. Greenberg, I am ready to start work immediately on the Andrews problem. I feel—"

"You've been waiting for me?" he said.

"I feel I am best equipped to solve the Andrews problem since it will call for new procedures and . . ."

"What on Earth is the Andrews problem?"

She looked at him blankly and said, "Why that's the problem that came in during the night, and I want to be the one who . . ."

"But you've nailed me out here on the steps before I've had a chance to go inside. How do I know what problems came in during the night? I haven't been upstairs yet."

"But you must know . . . you have heard of it, it's all on the news."

"There's a lot of junk on the news about our work, most of it untrue. Now why don't you wait until I get a look at it so I know what you're talking about."

They went up the escalator together in silence, he annoyed at being accosted in such a manner, and she annoyed at his obvious effort to put off doing what she wanted.

He started to go into his office first, but she said, "It's over in the Council Communications room, not in your office."

He started to retort, but thought better of it, and went on in and read the message. She said, "Now may I have it?"

"Look, damn it. This request is going to be treated like any other until we understand its ramifications. I am going to give it to Upton as I do all the others for a preliminary opinion and a recommendation as to assignment. After I have that recommendation I will decide what to do. Now don't bother me until Upton's had a look at it." He saw her mouth curve down and her eyes begin to fill. He had been through these crying sessions before, and he did not like them. "See you later," he said, and he all but ran to his office and locked the door. One thing nice at the Advisor Building. A locked door was inviolate. It meant the person inside did not want to be disturbed, and the caliber of the work was such that the wish was honored.

Anna Brackney raged back to her office. There it was again. A woman did not stand a chance around here; they refused to treat her like a man. Then she went and waited at Upton's office to explain the whole thing to him.

Upton was a portly man with an easy disposition and a mind like a razor. What's more, he understood the operation of a single-tracked mind. Anna had got out no more than half her tale of woe when he recognized that the only way to get her off his back for the day was to review the Andrews request. He sent for it, looked at it, whistled and sat down at a twenty-six-fifty computer. For half an hour he fed in data and sat back while the computer chewed and then spat out the results. The job grew, so he called in some help and soon there were three men working on the computers. In another three hours Upton swung around to Anna who had been standing behind him the entire time.

He said, "Do you have some ideas on this?"

She nodded.

"Care to tell me something about it?"

She hesitated, then said, "Well, I don't have it all yet. But I think it can be done by"—she paused and glanced at him shyly as if to see in advance whether or not he was laughing at her—"a vertical front."

Upton's jaw fell. "A ver . . . You mean a true front that is tipped perpendicular to the Earth's surface?"

She nodded, and put her finger in her mouth. Far from laughing, Upton stared at the floor for a moment, and then headed for Greenberg's office. He walked in without knocking and said to Greenberg, "There is a forty-six per cent chance of carrying out this Andrews mandate by conventional technics. And by the way, what's the matter with the Council? I've never known them to do such an idiotic thing before. What are they trying to do?"

Greenberg shook his head and said, "I don't know. I had a call asking about this from Wilburn. I've got the uncomfortable feeling that they're trying to see just what we *can* do here, sort of test us before they put some real big problem to us. They voted a drought for northern Australia yesterday, and maybe they are getting ready to put the real squeeze on some region and want to see what we can do first."

Upton said, "Drought in Australia? Well, they're getting a little tough, aren't they? That isn't like the good old easygoing Council that I know. Any difficulty with the Australian drought?"

"No. It was such a standard problem I didn't even bother to give it to you for screening. I turned it right over to Hiromaka. But there's something behind this Andrews thing, and I don't like it. We'd better find a way to carry it out."

Upton said, "Well, Brackney has an approach that's wild enough to work. Let's let her try to work out a

solution, and then we can look it over and see if we feel it has a better chance to work than conventional technics."

Anna Brackney had been standing near the door. She came forward and said angrily, "What do you mean 'wild'. There's nothing wrong with it at all. You just don't want me to be the one that solves it, that's all. You just—"

"No, no, Anna," said Greenberg, "that isn't it. You'll be the one to work it out, so don't—"

"Good, I'll start right now," said Anna, and she turned and left.

The two men looked at each other. Upton shrugged his shoulders, and Greenberg raised his eyes to the ceiling, shook his head, and sighed.

Anna Brackney sat herself down in her corner and stared at the wall. It was ten minutes before she put her finger into her mouth, and another twenty minutes before she pulled out a pad and pencil and began scribbling notations. It went fast then. With her first equation set up on a small sheet of paper, she left her office to find a resident mathematician; Anna refused to use the speaker at her desk to call one of them in.

The residents were all seated at desks in one large room, and when Anna entered they all bent over as if hard at work. Ignoring their behavior, Anna went up to the desk of Betty Jepson and placed the sheet of paper on it. Anna said without any preliminaries, "Run a regression analysis on this," and her finger traced out the equation in the form  $y = a_1x_1 + a_2x_2 + \dots + a_nx_n$ , "noting that  $n$  equals 46 in this case. Take the observational data from the banks of Number Eighty-three computer. I want a fit better than ninety per cent." And she turned on her heels and returned to her office.

Half an hour later she was back with another equation for Charles Bankhead, then one for Joseph Pechio. With the pattern established, she asked for the aid of a full mathemeteorologist, and Greenberg assigned Albert Kropa to her. Kropa listened to her somewhat disjointed description of what she was trying to do, and then wandered around looking over the shoulders of the residents to see what they were doing. Gradually he understood, and finally he raced to his own office and began turning out the polynomial relationships on his own.

Each equation demanded the full use of a sixteen-fifty computer and its staff under the direction of a resident, plus six hours of time to arrive at even a preliminary fit. As Anna and Kropa turned out more of the needed basic equations, it was apparent that too much time was being used in evolving each one individually. Anna broke off and spent two hours working out a method of programming a twenty-two thirty to explore the factors needed in each regression analysis. The computer began producing the required equations at the rate of one every ten minutes, so Anna and Kropa turned their attention to a method of correlating the flood of data that would descend on them when each analysis was complete. After half an hour it became apparent that they could not finish that phase of it before the data began coming in. They asked for and got two more full mathemeteorologists.

The four of them moved out to the Weather Room so they could be together as they worked. The correlating mathematics began to unfold, and all the remaining residents were called in to help with it. In another hour all the available sixteen-fifties were tied up, and Greenberg called on the University of Stockholm for the use of theirs. This held for twenty minutes, and then Greenberg called on half a dozen industrial computers in the city. But that wasn't

enough. The net of computers began widening steadily out to the Continent, reaching in another two hours to the cities on the eastern seaboard of the United States. The overriding authority of the Advisors in the solving of a weather problem was absolute.

It became necessary for Upton to join the group, and when Greenberg himself took a chair at the large circle in the Weather Room there was a brief break in the work for some catcalls and some affectionately sarcastic remarks. Commitment of the Advisors was total.

Anna Brackney seemed not to notice. Her eyes were glazed and she spoke in crisp sharp sentences in contrast to her usual vague and slurred sentences. She seemed to know just a little in advance when a breakdown in the mounting flow of data was impending, and she stepped in and supplied the necessary continuity. It was fifteen hundred before Hiromaka noticed that none of them had eaten lunch. Greenberg sent for food, again at twenty-three hundred, and again at zero nine hundred.

Everyone looked terrible with sunken cheeks and rumpled clothes and great hollows under the eyes. But there was fire in the eyes of all of them, even down to the newest resident, a fire born of participation in the most complex weather problem yet to confront the Advisors.

Upton took over the task of pulling together the mathematical models relating to the planet Earth. He kept under his control the regression analysis results relating to such variables as the various possible distances of Earth from the sun; the rotational positions of the Earth relating to the sun; the shape, position, density, variation, and charge of both van Allen radiation belts; the velocity, temperature, direction, width, and mass of fourteen hundred jet streams; the heat flow of the major ocean currents; the effect on air

drift of each major land mass; the heat content of the land masses; the Coriolis effect; and superimposed over all these factors and many more, the effect of the existing and programmed weather playing over the face of the entire Earth.

Greenberg took the sun and worked with the analysis results on the movement of each sunspot; the sun's rotations; fluctuating temperatures and pressures in the photosphere, reversing layer, chromosphere, and corona; spectrum variations; and the relative output from the carbon cycle and the proton-proton chain.

Anna wandered everywhere, now looking over Upton's shoulder, now on the phone to the computers in Washington, D. C., now guiding a resident on his next chore, now inventing a new notational system to simplify feeding newly-derived mathematical models into the computers. She wandered as if in a dream, but when a question was asked or when something slowed down, her responses were far from dreamlike. Many a resident, several computer operators, and Upton himself felt the bite of one of her crisp sentences pointing out what could have been a rather obvious blunder. As time wore on and the work grew more frantic, the normally harsh lines on Anna's face softened, and she walked erect instead of with her usual slouch. Several of the mathemeteorologists, who formerly would not even have talked to her unless it was absolutely necessary, found themselves willingly turning to her for further guidance on their part of the problem.

The first partial solution was fully worked out for the first time at eleven hundred hours the next morning. It had only an eight-one per cent fit, but that was good for the first time out; more would be coming soon. But Upton found a flaw. "No good," he said. "This solution would also increase that proposed

drought in Australia by a factor of twelve. That would be nice. We pull something like that and we'll all be back reading electric meters."

The remark struck a responsive chord in the group, and the laughter spread and grew more intense. In moments every person in the Advisors Building was convulsed with violent laughter as the long strain finally took its hysterical toll. It was several minutes before the eyes were wiped and the people settled down to work again. Greenberg said, "Well, that's where our danger will be. Not necessarily in Australia, but anywhere. We've got to make sure we don't get a drastic reaction somewhere."

Anna Brackney heard him and said, "De Pinza is working on a definitive analysis to insure that there can be no undesirable reaction. He'll have it in an hour." She walked off, leaving Greenberg staring after her.

It was fifteen hundred when the final set of equations was completed. The fit was ninety-four percent, and the check-out against De Pinza's analysis was one hundred and two percent. The residents and the mathemeteorologists gathered around the large table as Greenberg considered the results. They had finished none too soon. The procedure they had worked out called for sunside operations starting three hours after the beginning of the second shift, and that went on in four hours. Greenberg rubbed the heavy stubble on his face and said, "I don't know whether to let it go or not. We could report that our procedures are untried and ought not to be used all at once."

The eyes of the group turned to Anna Brackney, but she seemed supremely unconcerned. Upton voiced what was in everyone's mind. "There's a little bit of the heart of each one of us in there." He nodded to the equations. "Since they represent the very best that we can do, I don't see how we can report that they

ought not to be used. Right now those equations represent the best Advisors output; in that sense they *are* the Advisors. Both we and the people who put us here have to stand or fall on our best efforts."

Greenberg nodded, and handed the two sheets of paper to a resident and said, "Break it down to the sunside procedures and then send it up to the Weather Bureau. I hope they don't have to sweat it out the way we did." He rubbed his face. "Well, that's what we get paid for."

The resident took the sheets and went off. The others drifted away until only Greenberg and Upton were left. Upton said, "This will be quite a feather in Anna Brackney's cap. I don't know where she pulled her inspiration from."

"I don't either," said Greenberg. "But if she sticks her finger in her mouth again, I may quit the business."

Upton chuckled. "If she brings this one off, we'd better all learn to stick our fingers in our mouths."

James Eden rolled out of his bunk and stood poised on the balls of his feet. Yes, there was a faint, barely discernible chatter in the deck. Eden shook his head; the sun was rough, and it was going to be a bad day. If Base had a chatter, then the sessile boats would be hard to manage. Never knew it to fail. Try something tricky and you had to work in the worst possible conditions; try something routine, and conditions were perfect. But that was what you had to expect in the Bureau. Even the textbooks talked about it—an offshoot of an old Finagle Law.

Eden depilated and dressed, wondering what the job ahead of him would be like. They were always the last to hear anything, yet they were the ones who had to do all the dirty work. The whole Weather Congress depended on the Bureau. The Council was nothing

more than a bunch of rich old fat politicians who scratched each other's backs and spent their days cooking up Big Deals. The Advisors were a bunch of nuts who sat on their duffs and read out loud all the stuff the computers figured out. But the Bureau was something else again, a fine body of dedicated men who did a job so that the planet Earth could flourish. It was good to be in the Weather Bureau—and there it was again.

Eden could not keep his thoughts away from the problem that had been nagging at him during this entire tour. He rubbed his forehead and wondered again at the perversity of women. Rebecca, black-haired and black-eyed, with warm white skin, waited for him when his tour was over, but only if he left the Bureau. He could see her now, close to him, looking deep into his eyes, the soft palm of her hand pressed against his cheek, saying, "I will not share you with any person or any thing, even your beloved Bureau. I want a complete husband. You must decide." With other women he could have laughed and picked them up and swung them around and quickly jogged them out of the mood, but not Rebecca, not Rebecca of the long black hair. Damn it!

He swung around and stepped out of his tiny cabin and headed for the mess hall. There were half a dozen men already there when he entered, and they were talking and laughing. But they stopped what they were doing and looked at him and hailed him as he came in through the door. "Hey, Jim." "About time you were rolling out." "Good to see you, boy."

Eden recognized the symptoms. They were tense, and they were talking and laughing too loud. They were relieved to have him join them. They needed somebody to lean on, and Eden pitied them a little for it. Now they would not have to make such an

effort to appear normal. The others had felt the chatter in the deck, too.

Eden sat down and said, "Morning. Anything on the Board yet about the shift's work?"

The others shook their heads, and Pisca said, "Not a word. They always wait and tell us last. Everybody on the planet knows what's going on, but not us. All we get are rumors until it's time to go out and do it."

"Well," said Eden, "communication with the Bureau is not the easiest thing in the world, don't forget. We can't expect to hear everything as soon as it happens. But I sort of agree with you anyway; seems to me they could keep us posted better as things develop back on Earth."

They nodded, and then applied themselves to the breakfast. They chatted over coffee until a soft chime sounded throughout Base. They rose. It was time for the briefing, and they headed for the briefing room up at the top of the Base. Commander Hechmer was there when they walked in and took their seats. Eden watched carefully as he found a seat and sat down. In the past he had sometimes wondered if Hechmer had taken particular notice of him—an extra glance, closer attention when he asked a question, talking more to him than to the others at briefing, little things, but important nevertheless.

Commander John H. Hechmer was a legend in the Weather Bureau at the age of forty-five years. It was he who had evolved and perfected the Pinpoint Stream technic in which a thin stream of protons could be extracted from the 4,560-degree level in a sunspot and directed against any chosen sunside part of Earth. In the days when Hechmer was the Senior Boat Master in the Bureau, great strides had been made in weather control. A fineness and detail of weather patterns on Earth had become possible that had aston-

ished all the experts. Hechmer had even guided the Advisors, showing them the broadened scope of the Bureau's abilities. His handling of a sunboat had never been matched, and it was one of the goals in Eden's career—if he chose to stay with it—to be thought of as the man who most nearly approximated Hechmer.

Eden watched, and finally when Hechmer looked up from the table it seemed to Eden that his eyes swept the group to rest for an instant on Eden, and then they moved on. It was as if Hechmer wanted to assure himself that Eden was there. Eden could not be sure of this, but the possibility of it made him sit straighter in his chair.

Hechmer said, "Here is Phase One of the next shift's operation as received from the Advisors." He flashed the requisite portion of the page on the upright panel behind him. It took Eden one quick glance to see that it represented a substantial departure from customary procedure. Immediately he began to slump down in his seat as he lost himself in the problem of studying out how to handle it. He did not notice that Hechmer saw his instant grasp of the problem. It was a moment or two before several low whistles announced that the others had grasped it, too.

Hechmer sat quietly while they studied over the page. All of them were now thinking out how the report had to be modified to place it in useful condition for the Bureau to use. The advisors always prided themselves on stating their solutions in clear and explicit terminology. But as a practical matter their solutions were totally unusable as received for they did not mention many of the sun conditions that the Bureau had to cope with. These are accomplishments not explained by mathematics. It was one of the quiet jokes of the Bureau to listen to the talk of an Advisor about the thoroughness of his solution and about the lack of thinking required by the Bureau, and then

to ask the Advisor what he knew about "reversing granulation." No one except a working member of the Bureau could experience that strange upwelling sometimes found in the lower regions of the reversing layer.

The silence grew long. Eden's forehead was wrinkled with concentration as he tried to find some way to break into the problem. He finally saw a possible entry, and he pulled over a pad and began trying for a method of breakdown. Hechmer began to polish his own figures while the rest stared at the page on the wall as if hypnotized. It was ten minutes before another of the men finally began to make notes.

Eden sat back and looked over what he had written. With growing excitement he realized that his possible answer had never been tried before. As he looked at it more closely, though, he realized that it might not ever be done; it was a radical approach, calling for Boat performance not mentioned in the Boat specifications.

Hechmer said, "Gentlemen, we must begin. To start things off, here is my proposed answer. Pick it apart if you can."

Eden looked up at it. It was different, too, but it differed in that it called for the use of every single Boat on the sun, a thing never before needed. Hechmer's answer was to carry out the mission by sheer weight of numbers, and by this means to dig from the various levels in the sun's atmosphere the total of the streams and sheets needed to bring about the desired weather on Earth. But as he looked at it Eden began to see flaws. The streams, being taken from different parts of the sun's surface would strike the Earth and its environs at angles slightly different from those that were called for. Hechmer's answer might work, but it

did not seem to have as good a chance as Eden's answer.

Hechmer said, "The main feature wrong with this plan is the wide scattering of the impinging streams. Can you think of any way to overcome that?"

Eden could not, but his mind was more occupied with his own plan. If he could be certain that the Boats could stand submersion in the sun's surface for the required length of time, there would be few problems. Oh, communication might be more difficult, but with only one Boat down there would be a much reduced need for communication; the Boat would succeed or not, and no instructions from anywhere else could help.

One of the other men was beginning to suggest the unfeasible modification of having all the Boats work closer together, a grave mistake since the Boats could not control their toruses with sufficient nicety. Eden interrupted him without thinking. "Here is a possible answer." And he dropped his page on the desk.

Hechmer continued to look at the man who had been talking, waiting politely for him to finish. The man avoided an embarrassing situation by saying, "Let's see what Jim has to offer before we go on with this one."

Hechmer slipped Eden's page into the viewer, and they all studied it. It had the advantage at least of being readily understandable, and they all began talking at once, most of them saying that it couldn't be done. "You'll lose the Boat." "Yes, and the men in it, don't forget." "Won't work even if the Boat holds up." "You can't get a Boat that deep."

Eden carefully watched Hechmer's face while he studied the plan. He saw Hechmer's eyes widen, and then narrow again, and Hechmer realized that Eden was watching him closely. For a moment the room faded from Hechmer's mind, replaced by another sim-

ilar room, many years ago, when a younger and rasher Hechmer sat and anxiously watched his superior eye a new kind of plan. Hechmer said, without taking his eyes from the projected page, "Assuming the Boat can get down there, why won't this plan work?"

"Well," said the man who had stated it wouldn't work, "the streams and sheets won't necessarily emerge in the direction. . . ." But as he talked he noticed that the energy of the sunspot's field was channeled to serve as a focusing lens, and his words faded.

Hechmer nodded approval, "Glad you saw it. Anybody else? Any flaws in it once the Boat gets down and stays long enough?" The men worried at it, but could find nothing wrong, given the stated assumption. Hechmer continued, "All right, now why won't a Boat stand that kind of submersion."

One answered, "The sessile effect is not as great on the top. Burn right through."

Eden popped out, "No. Double the carbon feed to the top torus. That'll do it."

They argued for half an hour. Eden and two others defending the concept, and in the end there was no more opposition. They all worked at polishing the plan to take out as much risk as possible. By the time they finished there really was no decision for Hechmer to make. The group of Boat captains had accepted the plan, and it went without saying that Eden's boat would be the deep Boat. There was a bare half an hour to the start of the shift, so they went to get ready.

Eden struggled into the lead suit, muttering the same curses every Boatman since the first had muttered. The Boats had ample shielding, and the suits were to provide protection only if a leak allowed in some stray radiation. But on the sun it seemed highly unlikely that a leak would allow in only a little radia-

tion. It seemed much more likely that a leak would allow in so much of the sun's atmosphere that the men in the Boat would never know what hit them. A lead suit then would be like trying to dam a volcano with a feather. Nevertheless, lead suits were mandatory.

Entering the Boat from Base was always a tricky maneuver. The torus above the joining lock was not a permanent part of the lock, and if it moved, the full gravitational field of the sun could pull at the man, pulling his entire body down into his shoes. Eden slipped through and made the rounds of the Boat on the standard captain's inspection before he went to his chair and began the start-up procedure.

He noted the continuing roughness of the sun. First he checked the carbon supply, the material which vaporized and then in the form of a thin film protected the entire Boat from the searing heat of the sun's surface. The Boats rode the layer of vaporized carbon the way a drop of water rides a layer of vaporized water on a red-hot plate; this was the sessile effect. Next he checked the over-head torus. Here in a circular path there traveled a few ounces of protons at a velocity approaching that of light. At these velocities the few ounces of protons weighed incalculable tons and thus offset the enormous gravitational attraction of the sun itself. The same magnetic tape that supplied the field to maintain the protons in their heavy-mass state also served to maintain a polarity the same as that of the adjacent sun's surface. Hence the torus and the sun's surface repelled each other. Objects under the torus were subjected to two gravitational fields, the one from the torus almost, but not quite, canceling the sun's. As a result men worked in the Boats and in the Base in a 1-G field.

Eden ran down the entire list checking off one by one the various functioning parts of the Boat. His crew of four worked with him, each responsible for a

section of the Boat. Five minutes before castoff the board was green, and at zero time on the shift they shoved off.

The Boat felt good under his hands. It leaped and surged as the sun's surface roiled and boiled, but he kept it steadily headed outward, sliding ever downhill on its thin film of carbon vapor.

"How do you ride?" he said into the intercom.

A chorus of "fines" came back, so Eden tipped the Boat a little more to increase her speed. They were on a tight schedule and they had distance to make. As always Eden felt exhilarated as their speed increased, and he did the thing he always did when he felt that way.

Carefully, he drew back one after another of the sound-deadening panels on the bulkhead next to the pilot's seat. As the eighth panel drew back he could hear it faintly, and so he drew back the ninth panel slowly, and on the tenth the roar filled the pilot's cubicle. Eden sat bathed in a thunderous roar that washed over him, shaking his body with its fury, and taking everything from his mind except the need to fight and strain and hit back. This was the direct naked roar of the sun itself that came in upon him, the thunderous concatenation of a million fission bombs detonating every infinitesimal portion of a second. Its sound and fury were mind-staggering, and a man could only let a little of it in and keep his sanity. But that little was an awesome sound, cleansing, humbling, focusing a man's attention on the powers he controlled, warning him to mind his business.

This was a thing that Eden had never told to anyone, and no one had ever told him. It was his own secret, his own way of refreshing and replenishing whatever it was that made him the man he was. He supposed that he was the only one of the pilots that did this thing, and since on this one point he did not

think clearly, it never occurred to him to wonder how it came about that the only movable sound-deadening panels in the entire Boat happened to be located right alongside the pilot's seat.

For half an hour Eden guided the Boat toward its first action point, easily coping with the usual roughness of the sun's surface. He checked the operation of the inertial guidance system exactly twice as often as was required by standard operating procedure to make sure that the extra bouncing did not affect its precise operation. As they approached the action point, Eden closed the sound-deadening panels and checked in with his crew. "Four minutes to operation. What color have you?"

Back came the answer from all four points, "All green, Master." Formalities aboard the sessile Boat had started. Each man watched his own program, his fingers on the keys and his feet on the pedals, waiting for the position light. It winked on.

Out went the torpedolike capsules, down into the bowels of the sun where the carbon-nitrogen cycle raged. At a temperature of three point five million degrees the ablation head disintegrated and released into the inferno a charge of heavy nitrogen. The heavy nitrogen, appearing as it did at the end of the carbon-nitrogen cycle, disrupted the steady state conditions and produced a flood of helium that served to dampen and cool the fusion reactions in the entire region. The resultant thermal shock to the interior caused an immediate collapse followed by an incredible increase in pressure with the attendant temperature rise. The vast explosion heaved its way to the surface and became a great prominence licking its way toward the Earth and channeling huge masses of protons toward the preselected site in the vicinity of the Earth. The initial phase of the operation appeared successful.

The next hour passed in moving from site to site

and planting the proper charges, now to bring about a vast electron discharge at the correct angle, now to dampen a flare, now to shift the location of a spot. On two occasions the instruments showed that the detonations did not take place at a sufficiently precise location to meet the unusual requirements for accuracy, and so subsidiary detonations had to be made. They were in constant, if difficult, communication with the other three Boats and with Base. None of the Boats were specifically aware of it, but the beginnings of the Australian drought were set in motion during the second hour out.

There was no tension aboard Eden's Boat as the time for the deep operation approached; they were all too busy. When the time came Eden merely checked out over the communication net and reduced the polarity of the magnetic field on the overhead torus. The Boat went down fast, leaving the photosphere behind. Eden kept a careful check on the temperature drop across the walls of the Boat as they fell; when the sessile effect began to diminish, he wanted to know about it. The interior walls began to heat up sooner than he expected, and once they started, the heat-up proceeded ever more rapidly. A quick check showed that the rate of heating was faster than their rate of descent; they could not reach the required depth without becoming overheated. The Boat would not withstand the temperatures that Eden had thought it would. "Too hot, too hot," he said aloud. He checked the depth; they had another half a mile to go. There was no use in even attempting to release the water where they were. It was half a mile deeper, or nothing. The plan was in jeopardy.

Eden did not really pause to make the decision. He simply drastically cut the power to the polarity-control generators to the torus, and the Boat fell like a stone toward the center of the sun. It dropped the half mile

in forty seconds, the last few hundred yards in violent deceleration as Eden brought up the power level. The drop was so fast there was little additional heat-up. He hit the water releases and flung the Boat into the pattern that had been worked out, and in ten seconds the disruption was complete and a blast of Oxygen 15 was started on its way to Earth. The plan, at least, was consummated.

Eden brought up the torus power to a high level and the Boat began to rise to the relative safety of the surface. The time at the deeper level had been sufficiently short that the interior temperature of the Boat was at a tolerable 120 degrees F. The control panel showed no signs of trouble until they rose to within a thousand yards of the surface.

The steady rise slowed and drifted to a halt. The Boat sank a little and then bobbed up and down and finally found a level, and then it remained motionless. There was no way to strengthen the polarity in the torus. The instruments showed that full power flowed to the coils, and it was not enough. Eden began a check-out. He had barely started when a voice spoke in the intercom, "A portion of our right outboard coil is inoperative, Master. Possibly burned away, but I am checking further."

Eden turned his attention to the coils and soon saw the telltale reduced output. He activated all the thermocouples and other transducers in the vicinity of the coil, and in two minutes he understood what had happened. The burn-out had occurred at the point where the coil turned the corner. The sessile effect there must have been slightly less effective than elsewhere. The unexpectedly great heat had pushed past the film of carbon vapor and destroyed a portion of the titanium-molybdenum alloy wires. Full power to the coil

was not enough now to increase the polarity sufficiently for the Boat to rise any farther.

Eden cut into the intercom and explained the situation to the crew. A cheerful voice responded, "Glad to hear that there is nothing seriously wrong then. It is just that we cannot move up. Is that what you make of it, Master?"

"So far, yes. Anybody have any suggestions?"

"Yes, Master. I request a leave of absence."

"Granted," said Eden. "Now put in some time on this. We've got to get up."

There was silence aboard the Boat, and the silence stretched out to twenty minutes. Eden said, "I'll try to raise Base."

For ten minutes Eden tried to reach the Base or another Boat with his long-long wave-length radio. He was about to give up when he heard a faint and garbled reply. Through the noise he could just recognize the call of the Boat mastered by Dobzhansky. He transmitted their situation, over and over, so that the other Boat could fill in missing parts of any one message. Then he listened and eventually learned that they understood and would notify Base. But as they listened to the faint retransmission all sound faded. A check of their position showed that they had drifted out of radio range, so Eden tipped the Boat and began a circle. Three quarters of the way around he picked up the signal again and listened. He heard nothing but routine communication.

One of his men said, "Fine thing. We can move in every direction with the greatest of ease except the one direction we want to go."

Base was now coming in through the other Boat, and Hechmer himself was speaking. All he had to say was, "Stand by while we see what we can do about this."

There was no levity aboard the Boat now. The Boat floated a thousand yards beneath the surface of the sun, and they began to realize that there was nothing anybody could do about it. A sharpened corner on a coil, and the Boat was helpless to return to the surface. Each man sat and stared at his instruments.

A dark-haired vision floated in front of Eden's panel, and in his mind's eye Eden could see the reproachful look on her face. This was what she meant, the black-haired Rebecca, when she said, "I will not share you with any thing." He understood, for now she would be sorry for him, trapped in a place where men had never been.

"Lost the Boat again, Master." The words jarred him. He tipped the Boat and began the circle again. The shadow of Rebecca was still on him, but suddenly he grew very annoyed. What was this? The worry of a woman to get in the way of his work? This was not for him; this was not for the Bureau. There could be no cloudiness of mind, no dichotomy of loyalty—and then he saw the way up.

As he completed the circle he checked the charts and found the nearest sunspot. It was an hour away. He came within radio range again and told Dobzhansky he was heading for the sunspot and that he would come up to the surface there. So saying he headed for it. By the most careful operation they cut their time to the spot to fifty minutes. The last ten minutes of time on the way they spent in building the speed of the Boat to the maximum obtainable. A thousand yards beneath the surface of the sun they entered the magnetic discontinuity that defined the sunspot.

They rode into it in a direction opposite to that of its rotation, and the great coils of the Boat cut across the lines of enormous magnetic force. The motion generated power, and the additional power flowed to

the torus, and the Boat began to rise. It was a good spot, five thousand miles wide, and still in its prime. The Boat rode against the direction of its rotation and spiraled upward slowly as it went. It took great patience to note the fact that the Boat rose at all, but hour after hour they worked their way up and finally broke out on the indistinct surface. They rode the edges of the spot until Base came for them, and they docked the Boat and went aboard.

Eden reported to Hechmer, and they made arrangements to round off the relatively sharp corners on all coils. Most important of all, the deep technic appeared to be a success; it was added to the list of usable technics.

"Well," said Eden toward the end of the reporting session, stretching his tired muscles, "I see I'm due back on shift again in an hour. That doesn't give me much time to get rested up."

Then Hechmer said the thing that made Eden glad he had decided to stay in the Bureau. "Hm-m-m, that's right," said Hechmer, glancing up at the chronometer, "tell you what you do. You be an hour late getting back on duty."

George Andrews was very tired, and he had to work very hard to draw air into his lungs. He lay propped up on a soft bed out under the hot California sun, and his fingers plucked at the thin cover that lay over him. He was on a hilltop. Then he noticed an odd cylindrical-shaped cloud that seemed to rise from the level of the ground and reach way up through the scattered alto-cumulous clouds that dotted the blue sky. George Andrews smiled, for he could see it coming clearly now. The vertical cylinder of frothy clouds moved toward him, and he felt the chill as the leading edge touched him. He threw back the cover when the flakes began to fall so the snow could fall on him. He turned

his face up to it, and it felt cold and it felt good. But more than that, he felt content.

Here was the snow he had loved so much when he was a boy. And the fact that it was here at all showed him that men had not changed much after all, for this was a foolish thing. He had no trouble with the air now; he needed none. He lay under the blanket of snow, and it was a good blanket.

# EARTHLINGS GO HOME!

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BY MACK REYNOLDS (1917-1983)

ROGUE  
AUGUST

*Mack Reynolds was one of the very few science fiction writers of his generation to frequently set stories in the Third World. This was partly due to his intellectual interest in non-European peoples and their history and cultures, and partly due to the fact that he traveled almost constantly for a decade-long period when he worked as travel editor for Rogue, one of the most interesting (and I don't mean the pictures) of the "men's magazines" of the 1960s, and one that published much excellent science fiction, the bulk of it having nothing at all to do with the mildly erotic rationale of its ostensible existence.*

*"Earthling Go Home!" is an excellent example of Reynolds at his near best, and one of a handful of great sf tourism stories.*

Time was when a freewheeling bachelor could take off for Lhasa or Timbuktu and upon his return expect to have a conversation piece he could trade on for at least a few months. You know the scene; star attraction at the cocktail parties, bright young things hanging on your words, the other single males standing around looking bleak. You had it made.

Now everybody's been everywhere. Mention your trip to China and three guys yawn and say, yeah, wasn't it awful when the air-conditioning went on the blink at the Peiping Hilton in August. A world traveler is about as unique as an automobile in downtown Manhattan.

Which brings us to the point. You got to get out of the world, man. There's still so few space travelers, it's all but a monopoly. Go on, let's see you, how many people can you name that've been to the moon, even? See what I mean? Suppose the next time you're at a party and the conversation drags, you gaze contemptuously at the 99-to-1 Martini you're drinking and drop a nonchalant bit such as, "When I was on Mars, I got smashed on Canal Coolers. Now there's a dry drink. They make it from woji and dehydrated water."

There's this place and that place, in space, but if you're this free-wheeling type we're talking about, you'll be choosing Marsport for your vacation, a combination sin city and bargain paradise that'd be hard to equal. Let's start at the beginning.

Spaceship is the only means of transport that can be recommended, and so far as cost is concerned it doesn't make much difference—Pan-Planets Space-lines or Soviet Spaceways. You can't afford either. And don't jump to the conclusion that we're recommending stowing away. The last such case we heard of, a youth hosteler named Elmer Hung hid himself in a nook too near the rocket tubes. He was eventually discovered when a ship's officer noticed a bunch of Martian stevedores whomping up some barbecue sauce and became suspicious.

No, the only way is to utilize this new system of *Travel Now . . . let your grandchildren pay later*. Which is sort of a combination of the government's deficit spending now and letting posterity pick up the tab and the old airline system of *Travel Now, Pay*

Later. The loan companies pick your grandchildren, rather than your children, working on the theory that you're probably already so far in debt your kids won't be able to pay it off.

There's not much to say about space travel. The faster you travel, the more boring it becomes. Stroll five miles and you'll probably see a great deal, have an experience or so, meet somebody interesting, and the trip will take possibly two hours. Spend two hours driving along a highway in your car and you'll cover up to two hundred miles, see damn little but the road, and have no experiences whatsoever, you hope, since about the only thing that could happen would be a flat tire or a wreck. Spend the same two hours in a jet aircraft and you'll get halfway across the country and aside from a moment of take-off and one of landing, you'll see nothing except possibly the magazine the stewardess gives you to kill time.

So, okay, in a spaceship you have butterflies in the tummy during countdown and blast-off, and then you sit around doing nothing and with nothing to see except space, of which there is a lot, until you get to your destination. So it's boring.

The boredom ends once you set down in Marsport. Gentlemen, let's face reality. Things are *different* on Mars. If you think you've seen some strange items during your travels such as stand-up bathtubs in Japan, sexual mores in Scandinavia, food in England, politics in South America, forget about them. Till you've hit Marsport, you've seen nothing out of the way.

First things first. You'll want a pad. Unless you can sleep suspended by your knees, something like a bat, you'd better choose an Earth-side type hotel. We believe in adapting to local custom, but somehow Earthlings just don't get the hang of Martian beds.

If you're on a shoestring, you might try the Mars-

port Young Men's Christian, Hebrew, Moslem, Zen Buddhist and Reformed Agnostic Association. Without going into details, *all* Earth-side religions have combined their resources to open this hotel. It isn't as confusing as you'd first think. The Moslems take over the chapel on Friday, the Hebrews on Saturday, the Christians on Sunday, the Buddhists on Tuesday and the agnostics go to hell in their own way, all week long.

We'll mention in passing here, because this, being a rundown on high life in Marsport, wouldn't usually deal with religion at all, that Earth-side missionaries have a rough row to hoe on Mars, no matter what denomination. It's not that the Martians aren't religious. That is, they believe that Mars was created by a god, or gods, and that all things that live on Mars were also so created. But there the similarity ends to Earth-side religions. Instead of worshipping their gods, they sort of *ignore* them. They adopt a sort of hurt, reproachful attitude toward divinity. Kind of a why-did-you-have-to-do-this-to-us approach. They work on the theory that if the gods had to get onto this creating kick, they could have done it better.

If your budget isn't as tight as all that, you'll probably do as well at the Accelerated Motel as any place. No, that isn't a typesetter's or proofreader's mistake. It isn't the Excelsior Hotel; but the Accelerated Motel, and if you'll stick with us for a moment we'll point out that in spite of the fact that you haven't a car with you on Mars, the Accelerated might still be the best hostelry for you. It's not always in town, of course, but you can usually time your activities so that you can pick it up on the way through.

The fact of the matter is that the climate is so brutally hot in mid-day and so brutally cold at night that the owners of the Accelerated Motel met the situation by keeping on the move. In short, the establishment

is motorized, and keeps in the twilight zone. Of course, this might not be practical on Earth what with stronger gravity and international boundaries, but, like we keep telling you, Mars is different.

Happily, since the Accelerated is Earth-side owned, you'll be able to use American exchange and there'll be no problem there. However, this brings us to the Martian monetary system. They don't have any.

Earthling economists of every hue, including Marxists, are still in a condition of shock trying to make some sort of sense of the Martian means of exchange, but they don't seem to be getting very far. Martian historians will admit that some thousands of years ago they did use money on Mars but that it didn't work out so well. In fact, it caused a lot of trouble. It seems as though some people wanted to acquire unreasonably large amounts of the stuff and that led to all sorts of disagreeableness. So the Martians discontinued it.

Anticipating some of your questions, and admitting that we, ourselves, are none too clear, we can only say that it *seems* as though from the earliest youth each Martian simply puts everything he ever buys on the cuff. When he's eventually lived his life out and is laid to rest, the fiscal authorities settle it all up, deducting from the earnings of his lifetime everything that he spent.

Yes, yes, we know. You're saying, "Suppose his tab totals up to more than he earned?" And we can only say, repeating all over again that Mars is different, that in that case they wake him up and make him work out the difference. It seems that medicine is a science that is very advanced among the Martians.

Happily, this money problem isn't going to affect you much since you'll be paying off to Earth-side concerns for your hotel, food, drinks, and such.

And anticipating, once again, a matter that you'll undoubtedly bring up at this point, we can only say

that in spite of what you now think, you will *not* want to eat the native food and will *not* want to drink the native drinks. True enough, a few of the Martian dishes are such that you can sample them as prepared in your Earth-side type hotel, and adapted to your Earthling palate.

For instance, there's the dish they call the Cold Tamale, undoubtedly because visually it somewhat resembles the famed Mexican food. However, instead of being well laced with red chili peppers, the Martian version has a sort of *reverse* pepper, which, instead of burning your mouth, cools it to the point where you spit icicles, a very disconcerting experience the first time you sample the dish.

But it is not in food that you run into your greatest hazard in items Martian. Their drink can be even more startling, given Earthling tastes.

High on the list of Martian potables is woji, which is, uh, let us say, expanded, rather than distilled, from a strange berry that contracts in the deserts of Mars. Note that we said contracts rather than grows. We won't go into the biological aspects of Martian plant life at this point, but it is possibly this factor that leads to the strange effects of drinking woji.

Briefly, when you take your first drink of the lapis lazuli colored stuff, it gives you one hell of a hang-over, which only decreases slightly on your next drink. Your mouth feels like the proverbial bottom of a bird's cage, your head is splitting, you feel like tossing your cookies, you don't give a damn if school keeps or not. Why enumerate? You have one hell of a hang-over, period. It helps to take another slug and then another, but only partially. Altogether, you might put away as much as a pint, before stumbling off to bed, feeling as lousy as you ever have in your life.

The question you are now asking is, "Then why drink woji at all?"

And the answer is, when you wake up in the morning you feel swell. The stuff contains an ingredient something like a reverse alcohol. You get the hang-over first, and then feel fine the next morning. It takes getting used to.

But woji is for peasants. It's somewhat the equivalent of beer on Earth. The drink of the gods, given the Martian viewpoint, is nig, and the fact that it's gin spelled backwards has no significance since nig is more like champagne than anything else.

The truth of the matter is that you get high on nig. No, no, don't misunderstand. We mean literally high. And in that lies the difficulty with the delicious stuff.

You take your first glass of nig and a pleasant glow goes through you and you rise about two inches off the floor. It seems that one of nig's ingredients has an antigravity effect that has to be experienced to be believed. You have a bit of trouble at first but soon get the hang of it and maintain equilibrium. Two drinks and you're about two feet off the floor, but things are still fairly well under control. Three, and you're about six feet high and have various difficulties reaching down to the bar for further refreshment. However, this is just as well because that's the danger point. Thin air makes helicopters impractical on Mars and it can be tedious rescuing some two bottle man who has overindulged.

Once organized, you're going to want to do some sight-seeing and if you've read the tourist literature, you'll probably want to take a look at some of the famous Martian caverns which make the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky pale into insignificance. One thing, though, that the tourist pamphlets fail to mention, you're going to have to watch out for dugg. Which is another one of these deals that's hard to believe if you've never been off Earth before. It's a rather strange substance, very bothersome to those who stay

overlong in Martian caves and caverns. After an hour or so you start growing stalactites at a shockingly fast pace, from your nose, ears, chin, fingers, and, if by strange chance you happen to be nude, other extremities.

This being nude bit isn't as unlikely as you might think since the climate, lack of humidity, and so forth is such that clothing isn't the item on Mars that it is on Earth. In fact, the girls run about on their day by day duties in the equivalent of bikinis. This is balanced by the fact that when they go out onto the beach they get themselves all done up in what amounts to Mother Hubbards to protect themselves from the sun.

The beaches are impressive on Mars. You've never seen such beaches. In fact, we should say, such beach. Because all Mars is a beach. The trouble is, there's no water to go with it.

Which brings us to one phenomenon you're going to have to see before leaving Marsport. The great deposits, in the deepest depressions of what were once long eons past the oceans of Mars, of dehydrated water. Nothing like it is to be found on Earth. In fact, there's been some discussion of importing the stuff to be used in agriculture in such spots as the Sahara and Gobi deserts. Dry water, as it's sometimes called, would have various advantages. For one thing, it can be carried around very handily in burlap bags. It's also been considered for washing animals, such as cats, which don't like to get wet.

There's just one aspect of living-it-up on Mars that we haven't dealt with thus far and approach with a certain trepidation. We speak now of Martian women. In America of recent years there has been a great relaxing of censorship. In fact, what with Henry Miller's novels, the pocketbooks to be found on every magazine rack, not to speak of the delectable pinups which now have no difficulties in Uncle Sam's mails,

it's just about a thing of the past. However, at this point we're stymied. We simply can't run the chance of losing this magazine's mailing privileges by describing just *how* Martian girls differ from Earth-side girls and what it leads to . . .

Oh, yes. Just one last item. Don't pay any attention to the *Earthlings Go Home!* signs you'll see written all over the walls. These Martians have no sense of gratitude. After liberating the planet, Earth has been granting them aid for twenty years until now their whole economy is on the skids.



# THE STREETS OF ASHKELON

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BY HARRY HARRISON (1925- )

NEW WORLDS (G.B.)  
SEPTEMBER

*Harry Harrison debuted in the science fiction magazines in 1951 and has since established a solid reputation as a writer of action/adventure tales, while The Stainless Steel Rat (1961) and its many sequels have won a large audience of readers who appreciate outstanding social satire. Bill, The Galactic Hero (1965) is Harrison's answer to the super-efficient protagonists of Robert A. Heinlein. He is also the author of Make Room! Make Room! (1966) which was filmed as Soylent Green, starring Charlton Heston and Edward G. Robinson. He has lived in Ireland for many years.*

*"The Streets of Ashkelon" (also known as "An Alien Agony") is an example of a story whose theme was considered to be too dangerous by most sf editors of the early 1960s, and wound up in the British New Worlds after having been rejected by most of the available genre markets in the United States.*

Somewhere above, hidden by the eternal clouds of Wesker's World, a thunder rumbled and grew. Trader John Garth stopped when he heard it. . . .

"That noise is the same as the noise of your sky-

ship," Itin said, with stolid Wesker logicity, slowly pulverizing the idea in his mind and turning over the bits one by one for closer examination. "But your ship is still sitting where you landed it. It must be, even though we cannot see it, because you are the only one who can operate it. And even if anyone else could operate it we would have heard it rising into the sky. Since we did not, and if this sound is a sky-ship sound, then it must mean . . ."

"Yes, another ship," Garth said, too absorbed in his own thoughts to wait for the laborious Weskerian chains of logic to clank their way through to the end. . . .

"You better go ahead, Itin," he said. "Use the water so you can get to the village quickly. Tell everyone to get back into the swamps, well clear of the hard ground. That ship is landing on instruments and anyone underneath at touchdown is going to be cooked."

This immediate threat was clear enough to the little Wesker amphibian. Before Garth finished speaking Itin's ribbed ears had folded like a bat's wing and he slipped silently into the nearby canal. Garth squelched on through the mud, making as good time as he could over the clinging surface. He had just reached the fringes of the village clearing when the rumbling grew to a head-splitting roar and the spacer broke through the low-hanging layer of clouds above. Garth shielded his eyes from the down-reaching tongue of flame and examined the growing form of the grey-black ship with mixed feelings.

After almost a standard year on Wesker's World he had to fight down a longing for human companionship of any kind. While this buried fragment of herd-spirit chattered for the rest of the monkey tribe, his trader's mind was busily drawing a line under a column of figures and adding up the total. This could very well

be another trader's ship, and if it were his monopoly of the Wesker trade was at an end. Then again, this might not be a trader at all, which was the reason he stayed in the shelter of the giant fern and loosened his gun in its holster.

The ship baked dry a hundred square metres of mud, the roaring blast died, and the landing feet crunched down through the crackling crust. Metal creaked and settled into place while the cloud of smoke and steam slowly drifted lower in the humid air.

"Garth, where are you?" the ship's speaker boomed. The lines of the spacer had looked only slightly familiar, but there was no mistaking the rasping tones of that voice. Garth wore a smile when he stepped out into the open and whistled shrilly through two fingers. A directional microphone ground out of its casing on the ship's fin and turned in his direction.

"What are you doing here, Singh?" he shouted towards the mike. . . .

"I am on course to a more fairly atmosphered world where a fortune is waiting to be made. I only stopped here since an opportunity presented to turn an honest credit by running a taxi service. I bring you friendship, the perfect companionship, a man in a different line of business who might help you in yours. I'd come out and say hello myself, except I would have to decon for biologicals. I'm cycling the passenger through the lock so I hope you won't mind helping with his luggage."

At least there would be no other trader on the planet now, that worry was gone. But Garth still wondered what sort of passenger would be taking one-way passage to an uninhabited world. And what was behind that concealed hint of merriment in Singh's voice? He walked around to the far side of the spacer where the ramp had dropped, and looked up at the

man in the cargo lock who was wrestling ineffectually with a large crate. The man turned towards him and Garth saw the clerical dog-collar and knew just what it was Singh had been chuckling about.

"What are you doing here?" Garth asked; in spite of his attempt at self-control he snapped the words. If the man noticed this he ignored it, because he was still smiling and putting out his hand as he came down the ramp.

"Father Mark," he said. "Of the Missionary Society of Brothers. I'm very pleased to . . ."

"I said what are you doing here." Garth's voice was under control now, quiet and cold. He knew what had to be done, and it must be done quickly or not at all.

"That should be obvious," Father Mark said, his good nature still unruffled. "Our missionary society has raised funds to send spiritual emissaries to alien worlds for the first time. I was lucky enough . . ."

"Take your luggage and get back into the ship. You're not wanted here and have no permission to land. You'll be a liability and there is no one on Wesker to take care of you. Get back into the ship."

"I don't know who you are, sir, or why you are lying to me," the priest said. He was still calm but the smile was gone. "But I have studied galactic law and the history of this planet very well. There are no diseases or beasts here that I should have any particular fear of. It is also an open planet, and until the Space Survey changes that status I have as much right to be here as you do."

The man was of course right, but Garth couldn't let him know that. He had been bluffing, hoping the priest didn't know his rights. But he did. There was only one distasteful course left for him, and he had better do it while there was still time.

"Get back in that ship," he shouted, not hiding his anger now. With a smooth motion his gun was out of

the holster and the pitted black muzzle only inches from the priest's stomach. The man's face turned white, but he did not move.

"What the hell are you doing, Garth!" Singh's shocked voice grated from the speaker. "The guy paid his fare and you have no rights at all to throw him off the planet."

"I have this right," Garth said, raising his gun and sighting between the priest's eyes. "I give him thirty seconds to get back aboard the ship or I pull the trigger."

"Well I think you are either off your head or playing a joke," Singh's exasperated voice rasped down at them. "If a joke, it is in bad taste, and either way you're not getting away with it. Two can play at that game, only I can play it better."

There was the rumble of heavy bearings and the remote-controlled four-gun turret on the ship's side rotated and pointed at Garth. "Now—down gun and give Father Mark a hand with the luggage," the speaker commanded, a trace of humour back in the voice now. "As much as I would like to help, Old Friend, I cannot. I feel it is time you had a chance to talk to the father; after all, I have had the opportunity of speaking with him all the way from Earth."

Garth jammed the gun back into the holster with an acute feeling of loss. Father Mark stepped forward, the winning smile back now and a bible taken from a pocket of his robe, in his raised hand. "My son," he said.

"I am not your son," was all Garth could choke out as defeat welled up in him. His fist drew back as the anger rose, and the best he could do was open the fist so he struck only with the flat of his hand. Still the blow sent the priest crashing to the ground and fluttered the pages of the book splattering into the thick mud.

Itin and the other Weskers had watched everything with seemingly emotionless interest, and Garth made no attempt to answer their unspoken questions. He started towards his house, but turned back when he saw they were still unmoving.

"A new man has come," he told them. "He will need help with the things he has brought. If he doesn't have any place for them, you can put them in the big warehouse until he has a place of his own."

He watched them waddle across the clearing towards the ship, then went inside and gained a certain satisfaction from slamming the door hard enough to crack one of the panes. There was an equal amount of painful pleasure in breaking out one of the remaining bottles of Irish whiskey that he had been saving for a special occasion. Well, this was special enough, though not really what he had had in mind. The whiskey was good and burned away some of the bad taste in his mouth, but not all of it. If his tactics had worked, success would have justified everything. But he had failed and in addition to the pain of failure there was the acute feeling that he had made a horse's ass out of himself. Singh had blasted off without any good-byes. There was no telling what sense he had made of the whole matter, though he would surely carry some strange stories back to the trader's lodge. Well, that could be worried about the next time Garth signed in. Right now he had to go about setting things right with the missionary. Squinting out through the rain he saw the man struggling to erect a collapsible tent while the entire population of the village stood in ordered ranks and watched. Naturally none of them offered to help.

By the time the tent was up and the crates and boxes stowed inside it the rain had stopped. The level of fluid in the bottle was a good bit lower and Garth felt more like facing up to the unavoidable meeting.

In truth, he was looking forward to talking to the man. The whole nasty business aside, after an entire solitary year any human companionship looked good. *Will you join me now for dinner. John Garth*, he wrote on the back of an old invoice. But maybe the guy was too frightened to come? Which was no way to start any kind of relationship. Rummaging under the bunk, he found a box that was big enough and put his pistol inside. Itin was of course waiting outside the door when he opened it, since this was his tour as Knowledge Collector. He handed him the note and the box.

"Would you take these to the new man," he said.

"Is the new man's name New Man?" Itin asked.

"No, it's not!" Garth snapped. "His name is Mark. But I'm only asking you to deliver this, not get involved in conversation."

As always when he lost his temper, the literal minded Weskers won the round. "You are not asking for conversation," Itin said slowly, "but Mark may ask for conversation. And others will ask me his name, if I do not know his na . . ." The voice cut off as Garth slammed the door. This didn't work in the long run either because next time he saw Itin—a day, a week, or even a month later—the monologue would be picked up on the very word it had ended and the thought rambled out to its last frayed end. Garth cursed under his breath and poured water over a pair of the tastier concentrates that he had left.

"Come in," he said when there was a quiet knock on the door. The priest entered and held out the box with the gun.

"Thank you for the loan, Mr. Garth, I appreciate the spirit that made you send it. I have no idea of what caused the unhappy affair when I landed, but I think it would be best forgotten if we are going to be on this planet together for any length of time."

"Drink?" Garth asked, taking the box and pointing

to the bottle on the table. He poured two glasses full and handed one to the priest. "That's about what I had in mind, but I still owe you an explanation of what happened out there." He scowled into his glass for a second, then raised it to the other man. "It's a big universe and I guess we have to make out as best we can. Here's to Sanity."

"God be with you," Father Mark said, and raised his glass as well.

"Not with me or with this planet," Garth said firmly. "And that's the crux of the matter." He half-drained the glass and sighed.

"Do you say that to shock me?" the priest asked with a smile. "I assure you it doesn't."

"Not intended to shock. I meant it quite literally. I suppose I'm what you would call an atheist, so revealed religion is no concern of mine. While these natives, simple and unlettered stone-age types that they are, have managed to come this far with no superstitions or traces of deism whatsoever. I had hoped that they might continue that way."

"What are you saying?" the priest frowned. "Do you mean they have no gods, no belief in the hereafter? They must die. . . ?"

"Die they do, and to dust returneth like the rest of the animals. They have thunder, trees and water without having thunder-gods, tree sprites, or water nymphs. They have no ugly little gods, taboos, or spells to hag-ride and limit their lives. They are the only primitive people I have ever encountered that are completely free of superstition and appear to be much happier and sane because of it. I just wanted to keep them that way."

"You wanted to keep them from God—from salvation?" The priest's eyes widened and he recoiled slightly.

"No," Garth said. "I wanted to keep them from

superstition until they knew more and could think about it realistically without being absorbed and perhaps destroyed by it."

"You're being insulting to the Church, sir, to equate it with superstition . . ."

"Please," Garth said, raising his hand. "No theological arguments. I don't think your society footed the bill for this trip just to attempt a conversion on me. Just accept the fact that my beliefs have been arrived at through careful thought over a period of years, and no amount of undergraduate metaphysics will change them. I'll promise not to try and convert you—if you will do the same for me."

"Agreed, Mr. Garth. As you have reminded me, my mission here is to save these souls, and that is what I must do. But why should my work disturb you so much that you try and keep me from landing? Even threaten me with your gun and . . ." the priest broke off and looked into his glass.

"And even slug you?" Garth asked, suddenly frowning. "There was no excuse for that, and I would like to say that I'm sorry. Plain bad manners and an even worse temper. Live alone long enough and you find yourself doing that kind of thing." He brooded down at his big hands where they lay on the table, reading memories into the scars and calluses patterned there. "Let's just call it frustration, for lack of a better word. In your business you must have had a lot of chance to peep into the darker places in men's minds and you should know a bit about motives and happiness. I have had too busy a life to ever consider settling down and raising a family, and right up until recently I never missed it. Maybe leakage radiation is softening up my brain, but I had begun to think of these furry and fishy Weskers as being a little like my own children, that I was somehow responsible to them."

"We are all His children," Father Mark said quietly.

"Well, here are some of His children that can't even imagine His existence," Garth said, suddenly angry at himself for allowing gentler emotions to show through. Yet he forgot himself at once, leaning forward with the intensity of his feelings. "Can't you realize the importance of this? Live with these Weskers awhile and you will discover a simple and happy life that matches the state of grace you people are always talking about. They get *pleasure* from their lives—and cause no one pain. By circumstances they have evolved on an almost barren world, so have never had a chance to grow out of a physical stone age culture. But mentally they are our match—or perhaps better. They have all learned my language so I can easily explain the many things they want to know. Knowledge and the gaining of knowledge gives them real satisfaction. They tend to be exasperating at times because every new fact must be related to the structure of all other things, but the more they learn the faster this process becomes. Someday they are going to be man's equal in every way, perhaps surpass us. If—would you do me a favour?"

"Whatever I can."

"Leave them alone. Or teach them if you must—history and science, philosophy, law, anything that will help them face the realities of the greater universe they never even knew existed before. But don't confuse them with your hatreds and pain, guilt, sin, and punishment. Who knows the harm . . ."

"You are being insulting, sir!" the priest said, jumping to his feet. The top of his grey head barely came to the massive spaceman's chin, yet he showed no fear in defending what he believed. Garth, standing now himself, was no longer the penitent. They faced each other in anger, as men have always stood, unbending in the defence of that which they think right.

"Yours is the insult," Garth shouted. "The incredible egotism to feel that your derivative little mythology, differing only slightly from the thousands of others that still burden men, can do anything but confuse their still fresh minds! Don't you realize that they believe in truth—and have never heard of such a thing as a lie. They have not been trained yet to understand that other kinds of minds can think differently from theirs. Will you spare them this. . . ?"

"I will do my duty which is His will, Mr. Garth. These are God's creatures here, and they have souls. I cannot shirk my duty, which is to bring them His word, so that they may be saved and enter into the Kingdom of heaven."

When the priest opened the door the wind caught it and blew it wide. He vanished into the stormswept darkness and the door swung back and forth and a splatter of raindrops blew in. Garth's boots left muddy footprints when he closed the door, shutting out the sight of Itin sitting patiently and uncomplaining in the storm, hoping only that Garth might stop for a moment and leave with him some of the wonderful knowledge of which he had so much.

By unspoken consent that first night was never mentioned again. After a few days of loneliness, made worse because each knew of the other's proximity, they found themselves talking on carefully neutral grounds. Garth slowly packed and stowed away his stock and never admitted that his work was finished and he could leave at any time. He had a fair amount of interesting drugs and botanicals that would fetch a good price. And the Wesker Artifacts were sure to create a sensation in the sophisticated galactic market. Crafts on the planet here had been limited before his arrival, mostly pieces of carving painfully chipped into the hard wood with fragments of stone. He had supplied tools and a stock of raw metal from his own

supplies, nothing more than that. In a few months the Weskers had not only learned to work with the new materials, but had translated their own designs and forms into the most alien—but most beautiful—artifacts that he had ever seen. All he had to do was release these on the market to create a primary demand, then return for a new supply. The Weskers wanted only books and tools and knowledge in return, and through their own efforts he knew they would pull themselves into the galactic union.

This is what Garth had hoped. But a wind of change was blowing through the settlement that had grown up around his ship. No longer was he the centre of attention and focal point of the village life. He had to grin when he thought of his fall from power; yet there was very little humour in the smile. Serious and attentive Weskers still took turns of duty as Knowledge Collectors, but their recording of dry facts was in sharp contrast to the intellectual hurricane that surrounded the priest.

Where Garth had made them work for each book and machine, the priest gave freely. Garth had tried to be progressive in his supply of knowledge, treating them as bright but unlettered children. He had wanted them to walk before they could run, to master one step before going on to the next.

Father Mark simply brought them the benefits of Christianity. The only physical work he required was the construction of a church, a place of worship and learning. More Weskers had appeared out of the limitless planetary swamps and within days the roof was up, supported on a framework of poles. Each morning the congregation worked a little while on the walls, then hurried inside to learn the all-promising, all-encompassing, all-important facts about the universe.

Garth never told the Weskers what he thought about their new interest, and this was mainly because

they never asked him. Pride or honor stood in the way of his grabbing a willing listener and pouring out his grievances. Perhaps it would have been different if Itin was on Collecting duty; he was the brightest of the lot; but Itin had been rotated the day after the priest had arrived and Garth had not talked to him since.

It was a surprise then when after seventeen of the trebly-long Wesker days, he found a delegation at his doorstep when he emerged after breakfast. Itin was their spokesman, and his mouth was open slightly. Many of the other Weskers had their mouths open as well, one even appearing to be yawning, clearly revealing the double row of sharp teeth and the purple-black throat. The mouths impressed Garth as to the seriousness of the meeting: this was the one Wesker expression he had learned to recognize. An open mouth indicated some strong emotion; happiness, sadness, anger, he could never be really sure which. The Weskers were normally placid and he had never seen enough open mouths to tell what was causing them. But he was surrounded by them now.

"Will you help us, John Garth," Itin said. "We have a question."

"I'll answer any question you ask," Garth said, with more than a hint of misgiving. "What is it?"

"Is there a God?"

"What do you mean by 'God'?" Garth asked in turn. What should he tell them?

"God is our Father in Heaven, who made us all and protects us. Whom we pray to for aid, and if we are saved will find a place . . ."

"That's enough," Garth said. "There is no God."

All of them had their mouths open now, even Itin, as they looked at Garth and thought about his answer. The rows of pink teeth would have been frightening if he hadn't known these creatures so well. For one

instant he wondered if perhaps they had been already indoctrinated and looked upon him as a heretic, but he brushed the thought away.

"Thank you," Itin said, and they turned and left.

Though the morning was still cool, Garth noticed that he was sweating and wondered why.

The reaction was not long in coming. Itin returned that same afternoon.

"Will you come to the church?" he asked. "Many of the things that we study are difficult to learn, but none as difficult as this. We need your help because we must hear you and Father talk together. This is because he says one thing is true and you say another is true and both cannot be true at the same time. We must find out what is true."

"I'll come, of course," Garth said, trying to hide the sudden feeling of elation. He had done nothing, but the Weskers had come to him anyway. There could still be grounds for hope that they might yet be free.

It was hot inside the church, and Garth was surprised at the number of Weskers who were there, more than he had seen gathered at any one time before. There were many open mouths. Father Mark sat at a table covered with books. He looked unhappy but didn't say anything when Garth came in. Garth spoke first.

"I hope you realize this is their idea—that they came to me of their own free will and asked me to come here?"

"I know that," the priest said resignedly. "At times they can be very difficult. But they are learning and want to believe, and that is what is important."

"Father Mark, Trader Garth, we need your help," Itin said. "You both know many things that we do not know. You must help us come to religion which is not an easy thing to do." Garth started to say some-

thing, then changed his mind. Itin went on. "We have read the bibles and all the books that Father Mark gave us, and one thing is clear. We have discussed this and we are all agreed. These books are very different from the ones that Trader Garth gave us. In Trader Garth's books there is the universe which we have not seen, and it goes on without God, for he is mentioned nowhere; we have searched very carefully. In Father Mark's books He is everywhere and nothing can go without Him. One of these must be right and the other must be wrong. We do not know how this can be, but after we find out which is right then perhaps we will know. If God does not exist . . ."

"Of course He exists, my children," Father Mark said in a voice of heartfelt intensity. "He is our Father in Heaven who has created us all . . ."

"Who created God?" Itin asked and the murmur ceased and every one of the Weskers watched Father Mark intensely. He recoiled a bit under the impact of their eyes, then smiled.

"Nothing created God, since He is the Creator. He always was . . ."

"If He always was in existence—why cannot the universe have always been in existence? Without having had a creator?" Itin broke in with a rush of words. The importance of the question was obvious. The priest answered slowly, with infinite patience.

"Would that the answers were that simple, my children. But even the scientists do not agree about the creation of the universe. While they doubt—we who have seen the light *know*. We can see the miracle of creation all about us. And how can there be a creation without a Creator? That is He, our Father, our God in Heaven. I know you have doubts; that is because you have souls and free will. Still, the answer is so simple. Have faith, that is all you need. Just believe."

"How can we believe without proof?"

"If you cannot see that this world itself is proof of His existence, then I say to you that belief needs no proof—if you have faith!"

A babble of voices arose in the room and more of the Wesker mouths were open now as they tried to force their thoughts through the tangled skein of words and separate the thread of truth.

"Can you tell us, Garth?" Itin asked, and the sound of his voice quieted the hubbub.

"I can tell you to use the scientific method which can examine all things—including itself—and give you answers that can prove the truth or falsity of any statement."

"That is what we must do," Itin said, "we had reached the same conclusion." He held a thick book before him and a ripple of nods ran across the watchers. "We have been studying the bible as Father Mark told us to do, and we have found the answer. God will make a miracle for us, thereby proving that He is watching us. And by this sign we will know Him and go to Him."

"That is the sin of false pride," Father Mark said. "God needs no miracles to prove His existence."

"But we need a miracle!" Itin shouted, and though he wasn't human there was need in his voice. "We have read here of many smaller miracles, loaves, fishes, wine, snakes—many of them, for much smaller reasons. Now all He need do is make a miracle and He will bring us all to Him—the wonder of an entire new world worshipping at His throne as you have told us, Father Mark. And you have told us how important this is. We have discussed this and find that there is only one miracle that is best for this kind of thing."

His boredom at the theological wrangling drained from Garth in an instant. He had not been really thinking or he would have realized where all this was leading. He could see the illustration in the bible

where Itin held it open, and knew in advance what picture it was. He rose slowly from his chair, as if stretching, and turned to the priest behind him.

"Get ready!" he whispered. "Get out the back and get to the ship; I'll keep them busy here. I don't think they'll harm me."

"What do you mean. . . ?" Father Mark asked, blinking in surprise.

"Get out, you fool!" Garth hissed. "What miracle do you think they mean? What miracle is supposed to have converted the world to Christianity?"

"No!" Father Mark said. "It cannot be. It just cannot be. . . !"

"*Get moving!*" Garth shouted, dragging the priest from the chair and hurling him towards the rear wall. Father Mark stumbled to a halt, turned back. Garth leaped for him, but it was already too late. The amphibians were small, but there were so many of them. Garth lashed out and his fist struck Itin, hurling him back into the crowd. The others came on as he fought his way towards the priest. He beat at them but it was like struggling against waves. The furry, musky bodies washed over and engulfed him. He fought until they tied him, and he still struggled until they beat on his head until he stopped. Then they pulled him outside where he could only lie in the rain and curse and watch.

Of course the Weskers were marvellous craftsmen, and everything had been constructed down to the last detail, following the illustration in the bible. There was the cross, planted firmly on the top of a small hill, the gleaming metal spikes, the hammer. Father Mark was stripped and draped in a carefully pleated loincloth. They led him out of the church.

At the sight of the cross he almost fainted. After that he held his head high and determined to die as he had lived, with faith.

Yet this was hard. It was unbearable even for Garth, who only watched. It is one thing to talk of crucifixion and look at the gentle carved bodies in the dim light of prayer. It is another to see a man naked, ropes cutting into his skin where he hangs from a bar of wood. And to see the needle-tipped spike raised and placed against the soft flesh of his palm, to see the hammer come back with the calm deliberation of an artisan's measured stroke. To hear the thick sound of metal penetrating flesh.

Then to hear the screams.

Few are born to be martyrs; Father Mark was not one of them. With the first blows, the blood ran from his lips where his clenched teeth met. Then his mouth was wide and his head strained back and the guttural horror of his screams sliced through the susurrations of the falling rain. It resounded as a silent echo from the masses of watching Weskers, for whatever emotion opened their mouths was now tearing at their bodies with all its force, and row after row of gaping jaws reflected the crucified priest's agony.

Mercifully he fainted as the last nail was driven home. Blood ran from the raw wounds, mixing with the rain to drip faintly pink from his feet as the life ran out of him. At this time, somewhere at this time, sobbing and tearing at his own bonds, numbed from the blows on the head, Garth lost consciousness.

He awoke in his own warehouse and it was dark. Someone was cutting away the woven ropes they had bound him with. The rain still dripped and splashed outside.

"Itin," he said. It could be no one else.

"Yes," the alien voice whispered back. "The others are all talking in the church. Lin died after you struck his head, and Inon is very sick. There are some that say you should be crucified too, and I think that is

what will happen. Or perhaps killed by stoning on the head. They have found in the bible where it says . . ."

"I know." With infinite weariness. "An eye for an eye. You'll find lots of things like that once you start looking. It's a wonderful book." His head ached terribly.

"You must go, you can get to your ship without anyone seeing you. There has been enough killing." Itin as well spoke with a new-found weariness.

Garth experimented, pulling himself to his feet. He pressed his head to the rough wood of the wall until the nausea stopped. "He's dead." He said it as a statement, not a question.

"Yes, some time ago. Or I could not have come away to see you."

"And buried of course, or they wouldn't be thinking about starting on me next."

"And buried!" There was almost a ring of emotion in the alien's voice, an echo of the dead priest's. "He is buried and he will rise on High. It is written and that is the way it will happen. Father Mark will be so happy that it has happened like this." The voice ended in a sound like a human sob.

Garth painfully worked his way towards the door, leaning against the wall so he wouldn't fall.

"We did the right thing, didn't we?" Itin asked. There was no answer. "He will rise up, Garth, won't he rise?"

Garth was at the door and enough light came from the brightly lit church to show his torn and bloody hands clutching at the frame. Itin's face swam into sight close to his, and Garth felt the delicate, many-fingered hands with the sharp nails catch at his clothes.

"He will rise, won't he, Garth?"

"No," Garth said, "he is going to stay buried right

where you put him. Nothing is going to happen because he is dead and he is going to stay dead."

The rain runnelled through Itin's fur and his mouth was opened so wide that he seemed to be screaming into the night. Only with effort could he talk, squeezing out the alien thoughts in an alien language.

"Then we will not be saved? We will not become pure?"

"You were pure," Garth said, in a voice somewhere between a sob and a laugh. "That's the horrible ugly dirty part of it. You were pure. Now you are . . ."

"Murderers," Itin said, and the water ran down from his lowered head and streamed away into the darkness.

# WHEN YOU CARE, WHEN YOU LOVE

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BY THEODORE STURGEON (1918-1985)

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*Eleven years ago I wrote the following brief headnote to introduce this wonderful story to the readers of The Arbor House Treasury of Modern Science Fiction: "One dictionary defines love variously as 'an intense affectionate concern,' as 'a Passionate attraction' and as 'a zero score in tennis.' It is all of these and much more. It is tenderness, lust, concern. It is something people feel for other people, for all people, for all living things, for certain inanimate things, even for some abstract concepts. Within the science fiction universe Theodore Sturgeon has been the leading expert on this important subject, examining love in almost all of its dimensions."*

*I still feel this way, and the following story is all the evidence I need to prove my point.*

He was beautiful in her bed.

When you care, when you love, when you treasure someone, you can watch the beloved in sleep as you watch everything, anything else—laughter, lips to a cup, a look even away from you; a stride, sun a-struggle lost in a hair-lock, a jest or a gesture—even stillness, even sleep.

She leaned close, all but breathless, and watched his lashes. Now, lashes are thick sometimes, curled, russet; these were all these and glossy besides. Look closely—there where they curve lives light in tiny serried scimitars.

All so good, so very good, she let herself deliciously doubt its reality. She would let herself believe, in a moment, that this was real, was true, was here, had at last happened. All the things her life before had ever given her, all she had ever wanted, each by each had come to her purely for wanting. Delight there might be, pride, pleasure, even glory in the new possession of gift, privilege, object, experience: her ring, hat, toy, trip to Trinidad; yet, with possession there had always been (until now) the platter called *well, of course* on which these things were served her. For had she not wanted it? But this, now—*him*, now . . . greatest of all her wants, ever; first thing in all her life to transcend want itself and knowingly become need: this she had at last, at long (how long, now) long last, this she had now for good and all, for always, forever and never a touch of *well, of course*. He was her personal miracle, he in this bed now, warm and loving her. He was the reason and the reward of it all—her family and forebears, known by so few and felt by so many, and indeed, the whole history of mankind leading up to it, and all she herself had been and done and felt; and loving him, and losing him, and seeing him dead and bringing him back—it was all for this moment and because the moment had to be, he and this peak, this warmth in these sheets, this *now* of hers. He was all life and all life's beauty, beautiful in her bed; and now she could be sure, could believe it, believe . . .

"I do," she breathed. "I do."

"What do you do?" he asked her. He had not moved, and did not now.

"Devil, I thought you were asleep."

"Well, I was. But I had the feeling someone was looking."

"Not looking," she said softly. "Watching." She was watching the lashes still and did not see them stir, but between them now lay a shining sliver of the gray cool aluminum of his surprising eyes. In a moment he would look at her—just that—in a moment their eyes would meet and it would be as if nothing new had happened (for it would be the same metal missile which had first impaled her) and also as if everything, everything were happening again. Within her, passion boiled up like a fusion fireball, so beautiful, so huge . . .

. . . and like the most dreaded thing on earth, without pause the radiance changed, shifting from the hues of all the kinds of love to all the tones of terror and the colors of a cataclysm.

She cried his name . . .

And the gray eyes opened wide in fear for her fears and in astonishment, and he bounded up laughing, and the curl of his laughing lips turned without pause to the pale writhing of agony, and they shrank apart, too far apart while the white teeth met and while between them he shouted his hurt. He fell on his side and doubled up, grunting, gasping in pain . . . grunting, gasping, wrapped away from her, even her, unreachable even by her.

She screamed. She screamed. She . . .

A Wyke biography is hard to come by. This has been true for four generations, and more true with each, for the more the Wyke holdings grew, the less visible have been the Wyke family, for so Cap'n Gamaliel Wyke willed it after his conscience conquered him. This (for he was a prudent man) did not happen until after his retirement from what was

euphemistically called the molasses trade. His ship—later, his fleet—had carried fine New England rum, made from molasses, to Europe, having brought molasses from the West Indies to New England. Of course a paying cargo was needed for the westward crossing, to close with a third leg this profitable triangle; and what better cargo than Africans for the West Indies, to harvest the cane and work in the mills which made the molasses?

Ultimately affluent and retired, he seemed content for a time to live among his peers, carrying his broadcloth coat and snowy linen as to the manor born, limiting his personal adornment to a massive golden ring and small square gold buckles at his knee. Soberly shoptalking molasses often, rum seldom, slaves never, he dwelt with a frightened wife and a silent son, until she died and something—perhaps loneliness—coupled his brain again to his sharp old eyes and made him look about him. He began to dislike the hypocrisy of man and was honest enough to dislike himself as well, and this was a new thing for the Cap'n; he could not deny it and he could not contain it, so he left the boy with the household staff and, taking only a manservant, went into the wilderness to search his soul.

The wilderness was Martha's Vineyard, and right through a bitter winter the old man crouched by the fire when the weather closed in and, muffled in four great gray shawls, paced the beaches when it was bright, his brass telescope under his arm and his grim canny thoughts doing mighty battle with his convictions. In the late spring he returned to Wiscassett, his blunt certainty regained, his laconic curtness increased almost to the point of speechlessness. He sold out (as a startled contemporary described it) "everything that showed" and took his son, an awed obedient eleven, back to the Vineyard where to the accompaniment of tolling breakers and creaking gulls, he gave the boy

an education to which all the schooling of all the Wykes for all of four generations would be mere addenda.

For in his retreat to the storms and loneliness of the inner self and the Vineyard, Gamaliel Wyke had come to terms with nothing less than the Decalogue.

He had never questioned the Ten Commandments, nor had he knowingly disobeyed them. Like many another before him, he attributed the sad state of the world and the sin of its inhabitants to their refusal to heed those rules. But in his ponderings, God himself, he at last devoutly concluded, had underestimated the stupidity of mankind. So he undertook to amend the Decalogue himself by adding ". . . or cause . . ." to each commandment, just to make it easier for a man to work with:

". . . or cause the name of the Lord to be taken in vain.

". . . or cause stealing to be done.

". . . or cause dishonor to thy father and thy mother.

". . . or cause the commission of adultery.

". . . or cause a killing to be done."

But his revelation came to him when he came to the last one. It was suddenly clear to him that all mankind's folly—all greed, lust, war, all dishonor—sprang from humanity's almost total disregard for this edict and its amendment. "Thou shalt not covet . . . *nor cause covetousness!*"

It came to him then that to arouse covetousness in another is just as deadly a sin as to kill him or to cause his murder. Yet all around the world empires rose, great yachts and castles and hanging gardens came into being, tombs and trusts and college grants, all for the purpose of arousing the envy or covetousness of the less endowed—or having that effect no matter what the motive.

Now, one way for a man as rich as Gamaliel Wyke to have resolved the matter for himself would be St. Francis's way; but (though he could not admit this or even recognize it) he would have discarded the Decalogue and his amendments, all surrounding scripture and his gnarled right arm rather than run so counter to his inborn, ingrained Yankee acquisitiveness. And another way might have been to take his riches and bury them in the sand of Martha's Vineyard, to keep them from causing covetousness; the very thought clogged his nostrils with the feel of dune sand and he felt suffocation; to him money was a living thing and should not be interred.

And so he came to his ultimate answer: make your money, enjoy it, but *never let anyone know*. Desire, he concluded, for a neighbor's wife or a neighbor's ass or for anything, presupposed knowing about these possessions. No neighbor could desire anything of his if he couldn't lay a name to it.

So Gamaliel brought weight like granite and force like gravity to bear upon the mind and soul of his son Walter, and Walter begat Jedediah, and Jedediah begat Caiphas (who died) and Samuel, and Samuel begat Zebulon (who died) and Sylva; so perhaps the true beginning of the story of the boy who became his own mother lies with Cap'n Gamaliel Wyke and his sand-scoured, sea-deep, rock-hard revelation.

. . . fell on his side on the bed and doubled up, grunting, gasping in pain, grunting, gasping, wrapped away from her, even her, unreachable even by her.

She screamed. She screamed. She pressed herself up and away from him and ran naked into the sitting room, pawed up the ivory telephone: "Keogh" she cried; "for the love of God, *Keogh!*"

. . . and back into the bedroom where he lay open-mouthing a grating horrible *uh uh!* while she wrung

her hands, tried to take one of his, found it agony-tense and unaware of her. She called him, called him and once, screamed again.

The buzzer sounded with inexcusable discretion.

"Keogh!" she shouted, and the polite buzzer *shhh'd* her again—the lock, oh, the damned lock . . . she picked up her negligee and ran with it in her hand through the dressing room and the sitting room and the hall and the living room and the foyer and flung open the door. She pulled Keogh through it before he could turn away from her; she thrust one arm in a sleeve of the garment and shouted at him, "Keogh, please, please, Keogh, what's wrong with him?" and she fled to the bedroom, Keogh sprinting to keep up with her.

Then Keogh, chairman of the board of seven great corporations, board member of a dozen more, general manager of a quiet family holding company which had, for most of a century, specialized in the ownership of corporate owners, went to the bed and fixed his cool blue gaze on the agonized figure there.

He shook his head slightly.

"You called the wrong man," he snapped, and ran back to the sitting room, knocking the girl aside as if he had been a machine on tracks. He picked up the phone and said, "Get Rathburn up here. *Now*. Where's Weber? You don't? Well, find him and get him here . . . I don't care. Hire an airplane. *Buy* an airplane."

He slammed down the phone and ran back into the bedroom. He came up behind her and gently lifted the negligee onto her other shoulder, and speaking gently to her all the while, reached around her and tied the ribbon belt. "What happened?"

"N-nothing, he just . . ."

"Come on, girl—clear out of here. Rathburn's practically outside the door, and I've sent for Weber. If

there's a better doctor than Rathburn, it could only be Weber, so you've got to leave it to them. Come!"

"I won't leave him."

"Come!" Keogh rapped, then murmured, looking over her shoulder at the bed, "he wants you to, can't you see? He doesn't want you to see him like this. *Right?*" he demanded, and the face, turned away and half-buried in the pillow shone sweatily; cramp mounded the muscles on the side of the mouth they could just see. Stiffly the head nodded; it was like a shudder. "And . . . shut . . . door . . . tight . . ." he said in a clanging half-whisper.

"Come," said Keogh. And again, "Come." He propelled her away; she stumbled. Her face turned yearningly until Keogh, both hands on her, kicked at the door and it swung and the sight of the bed was gone. Keogh leaned back against the door as if the latch were not enough to hold it closed.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?"

"I don't know," he said.

"You do, you do. . . . You always know everything. . . . Why won't you let me stay with him?"

"He doesn't want that."

Overcome, inarticulate, she cried out.

"Maybe," he said into her hair, "he wants to scream too."

She struggled—oh, strong, lithe and strong she was. She tried to press past him. He would not budge, so at last, at last she wept.

He held her in his arms again, as he had not done since she used to sit on his lap as a little girl. He held her in his arms and looked blindly toward the unconcerned bright morning, seen soft-focused through the cloud of her hair. And he tried to make it stop, the morning, the sun, the time, but . . .

. . . but there is one certain thing only about a

human mind, and that is that it acts, moves, works ceaselessly while it lives. The action, motion, labor differ from that of a heart, say, or an epithelial cell, in that the latter have functions and in any circumstance perform their functions. Instead of a function, mind had a duty, that of making of a hairless ape a human being. . . . Yet as if to prove how trivial a difference there is between mind and muscle, mind must move, to some degree, always change, to some degree, always while it lives, like a stinking sweat gland. . . . Holding her, Keogh thought about Keogh.

The biography of Keogh is somewhat harder to come by than that of a Wyke. This is not in spite of having spent merely half a lifetime in this moneyed shadow; it is because of it. Keogh was a Wyke in all but blood and breeding: Wyke owned him and all he owned, which was a great deal.

He must have been a child once, a youth; he could remember if he wished but did not care to. Life began for him with the *summa cum laude*, the degrees in both business and law and (so young) the year and a half with Hinnegan and Bache and then the incredible opening at the International Bank; the impossible asked of him in the Zurich-Plenum affair and his performance of it and the shadows which grew between him and his associates over the years, while for him the light grew and grew as to the architecture of his work until at last he was admitted to Wyke and was permitted to realize that Wyke was Zurich and Plenum and the International Bank and Hinnegan and Bache; was indeed his law school and his college and much, so very much more. And finally sixteen—good heavens, it was eighteen—years ago, when he became general manager and the shadows dark to totally black between him and any other world, while the light, his own huge personal illumination, exposed almost to

him alone an industrial-financial complex unprecedented in his country and virtually unmatched in the world.

But then, the beginning, the *other* beginning, was when old Sam Wyke called him in so abruptly that morning, when (though general manager with many a board chairman, all unbeknownst, under him in rank) he was still the youngest man in that secluded office.

"Keogh," said old Sam, "this is my kid. Take 'er out. Give 'er anything she wants. Be back here at six." He had then kissed the girl on the crown of her dark straw hat, gone to the door, turned and barked, "You see her show off or brag, Keogh, you fetch her a good one, then and there, hear? I don't care what else she does, but don't you let her wave something she's got at someone that hasn't got it. That's rule one." He had then breezed out, leaving a silent, startled young mover of mountains locking gazes with an unmoving mouse of an eleven-year-old girl. She had luminous pale skin, blue-black, silky-shining hair and thick level black brows.

The *summa cum laude*, the acceptance at Hinnegan and Bache—all such things, they were beginnings that he knew were beginnings. This he would not know for some time that it was a beginning, any more than he could realize that he had just heard the contemporary version of Cap'n Gamaliel's "Thou shalt not . . . cause covetousness." At the moment, he could only stand nonplused for a moment, then excuse himself and go to the treasure's office, where he scribbled a receipt and relieved the petty cash box of its by no means petty contents. He got his hat and coat and returned to the president's office. Without a word the child rose and moved with him to the door.

They lunched and spent the afternoon together and were back at six. He bought her whatever she wanted at one of the most expensive shops in New York. He

took her to just the places of amusement she asked him to.

When it was all over he returned the stack of bills to the petty cash box, less the one dollar and twenty cents he had paid out. For at the shop—the largest toy store in the world—she had carefully selected a sponge rubber ball, which they packed for her in a cubical box. This she carried carefully by its string for the rest of the afternoon.

They lunched from a pushcart. He had one hot dog with kraut; she had two with relish.

They rode uptown on the top of a Fifth Avenue double-decker open-top bus.

They went to the zoo in Central Park and bought one bag of peanuts for the girl and the pigeons and one bag of buns for the girl and the bears.

Then they took another double-decker back downtown, and that was it; that was the afternoon.

He remembered clearly what she looked like then: like a straw-hatted wren, for all it was a well-brushed wren. He could not remember what they had talked about, if indeed they had talked much at all. He was prepared to forget the episode, or at least to put it neatly in the *Trivia: Misc: Closed* file in his compartmented mind when, a week later, old Sam tossed him a stack of papers and told him to read them through and come and ask questions if he thought he had to. The only question which came to mind when he had read them was "Are you sure you want to go through with this?" and that was not the kind of question one asked old Sam. So he thought it over very carefully and came up with "Why me?" and old Sam looked him up and down and growled, "she likes you, that's why."

And so it was that Keogh and the girl lived together in a cotton mill town in the South for a year. Keogh worked in the company store. The girl worked in the

mill; twelve-year-old girls worked in cotton mills in the South in those days. She worked the morning shift and half the evening shift and had three hours' school in the afternoons. Up until ten o'clock on Saturday nights they watched the dancing from the sidelines. On Sundays they went to the Baptist church. Their name while they were there was Harris. Keogh used to worry frantically when she was out of his sight, but one day when she was crossing the catwalk over the water-circulating sump, a sort of oversized well beside the mill, the catwalk broke and pitched her into the water. Before she could so much as draw a breath a Negro stoker appeared out of nowhere—actually, out of the top of the coal chute—and leaped in and had her and handed her up to the sudden crowd. Keogh came galloping up from the company store as they were pulling the stoker out, and after seeing that the girl was all right, knelt beside the man, whose leg was broken.

"I'm Mr. Harris, her father. You'll get a reward for this. What's your name?"

The man beckoned him close, and as he bent down, the stoker in spite of his pain, grinned and winked. "You don' owe me a thang, Mr. Keogh," he murmured. In later times, Keogh would be filled with rage at such a confidence, would fire the man out of hand: this first time he was filled with wonder and relief. After that, things were easier on him, as he realized that the child was surrounded by Wyke's special employees, working on Wyke land in a Wyke mill and paying rent in a Wyke row house.

In due time the year was up. Someone else took over, and the girl, now named Kevin and with a complete new background in case anyone should ask, went off for two years to a very exclusive Swiss finishing school, where she dutifully wrote letters to a Mr. and

Mrs. Kevin who held large acreage in the Pennsylvania mountains, and who just as dutifully answered her.

Keogh returned to his own work, which he found in apple-pie order, with every one of the year's transactions beautifully abstracted for him and an extra amount, over and above his astronomical salary, tucked away in one of his accounts—an amount that startled even Keogh. He missed her at first, which he expected. But he missed her every single day for two solid years, a disturbance he could not explain, did not examine and discussed with no one.

All the Wykes, old Sam once grunted to him, did something of the sort. He, Sam, had been a logger in Oregon and a year and a half as utility man, then ordinary seaman on a coastwise tanker.

Perhaps some deep buried part of Keogh's mind thought that when she returned from Switzerland they would go for catfish in an old flat-bottomed boat again or that she would sit on his lap while he suffered on the hard benches of the once-a-month picture show. The instant he saw her on her return from Switzerland he knew that would never be. He knew he was entering some new phase; it troubled and distressed him and he put it away in the dark inside himself; he could do that; he was strong enough. And she—well, she flung her arms around him and kissed him; but when she talked with this new vocabulary, this deft school finish, she was strange and awesome to him, like an angel. Even a loving angel is strange and awesome. . . .

They were together again then for a long while, but there were no more hugs. He became a Mr. Stark in the Cleveland office of a brokerage house and she boarded with an elderly couple, went to the local high school and had a part-time job filing in his office. This was when she learned the ins and outs of the business, the size of it. It would be hers. It became hers while

they were in Cleveland: old Sam died very suddenly. They slipped away to the funeral but were back at work on Monday. They stayed there for another eight months; she had a great deal to learn. In the fall she entered a small private college and Keogh saw nothing of her for a year.

"Shhh," he breathed to her, crying, and *shhh!* said the buzzer.

"The doctor . . ."

"Go take a bath," he said. He pushed her.

She half-turned under his hand, faced him again blazing. "No!"

"You can't go in there, you know," he said, going for the door. She glared at him, but her lower lip trembled.

Keogh opened the door. "In the bedroom."

"Who . . . ?" Then the doctor saw the girl, her hands knotted together, her face twisted, and had his answer. He was a tall man, gray, with quick hands, a quick step, swift words. He went straight through foyer, hall and rooms and into the bedroom. He closed the door behind him. There had been no discussion, no request and refusal; Dr. Rathburn had simply, quickly, quietly shut them out.

"Go take a bath."

"No."

"Come on." He took her wrist and led her to the bathroom. He reached into the shower stall and turned on the side jets. There were four at each corner; the second from the top was scented. Apple blossom. "Go on."

He moved toward the door. She stood where he had let go of her wrist, pulling at her hands. "Go on," he said again. "Just a quick one. Do you good." He waited. "Or do you want me to douse you myself? I bet I still can."

She flashed him a look; indignation passed instantly as she understood what he was trying to do. The rare spark of mischief appeared in her eyes and, in perfect imitation of a mill row red-neck, she said, "Y'all try it an ah'll tall th' shurff ah ain't rightly you' chile." But the effort cost her too much and she cried again. He stepped out and softly closed the door.

He was waiting by the bedroom when Rathburn slid out and quickly shut the door on the grunt, the gasp.

"What is it?" asked Keogh.

"Wait a minute." Rathburn strode to the phone. Keogh said, "I sent for Weber."

Rathburn came almost ludicrously to a halt. "Wow," he said. "Not bad diagnosing, for a layman. Is there anything you can't do?"

"I can't understand what you're talking about," said Keogh testily.

"Oh, I thought you knew. Yes, I'm afraid it's in Weber's field. What made you guess?"

Keogh shuddered. "I saw a mill hand take a low blow once. I know *he* wasn't hit. What exactly is it?"

Rathburn darted a look around. "Where is she?" Keogh indicated the bathroom. "I told her to take a shower."

"Good," said the doctor. He lowered his voice. "Naturally I can't tell without further examination and lab . . ."

"*What is it?*" Keogh demanded, not loud, but with such violence that Rathburn stepped back a pace.

"It could be choriocarcinoma."

Tiredly, Keogh wagged his head. "Me diagnose that? I can't even spell it. What is it?" He caught himself up, as if he had retrieved the word from thin air and run it past him again. "I know what the last part of it means."

"One of the . . ." Rathburn swallowed, and tried again. "One of the more vicious forms of cancer. And

it . . ." He lowered his voice again. "It doesn't always hit this hard."

"Just how serious is it?"

Rathburn raised his hands and let them fall.

"Bad, eh? Doc—*how bad*. . . ?"

"Maybe some day we can . . ." Rathburn's lowered voice at last disappeared. They hung there, each on the other's pained gaze.

"How much time?"

"Maybe six weeks."

"*Six weeks!*"

"Shh," said Rathburn nervously.

"Weber . . ."

"Weber knows more about internal physiology than anybody. But I don't know if that will help. It's a little like . . . your, uh, house is struck by lightning, flattened, burned to the ground. You can examine it and the weather reports and, uh, know exactly what happened. Maybe some day we can . . ." he said again, but he said it so hopelessly that Keogh, through the roiling mists of his own terror, pitied him and half-instinctively put out a hand. He touched the doctor's sleeve and stood awkwardly.

"What are you going to do?"

Rathburn looked at the closed bedroom door. "What I did." He made a gesture with a thumb and two fingers. "Morphine."

"And that's all?"

"Look, I'm a GP. Ask Weber, will you?"

Keogh realized that he had pushed the man as far as he could in his search for a crumb of hope; if there was none, there was no point in trying to squeeze it out. He asked, "Is there anyone working on it? Anything new? Can you find out?"

"Oh, I will, I will. But Weber can tell you off the top of his head more than I could find out in six months . . . in a long time."

A door opened. She came out, hollow-eyed, but pink and glowing in a long white terry-cloth robe. "Dr. Rathburn . . ."

"He's asleep."

"Thank God. Does it . . . ?"

"There's no pain."

"What is it? What happened to him?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to say for sure. . . . We're waiting for Dr. Weber. He'll know."

"But—but is he . . . ?"

"He'll sleep the clock around."

"Can I . . . ?" The timidity, the caution, Keogh realized, was so unlike her. "Can I see him?"

"He's fast asleep!"

"I don't care. I'll be quiet. I won't—touch him or anything."

"Go ahead," said Rathburn. She opened the bedroom door and eagerly, silently slipped inside.

"You'd think she was trying to make sure he was there."

Keogh, who knew her so very well, said, "she is."

But a biography of Guy Gibbon is *really* hard to come by. For he was no exceptional executive, who for all his guarded anonymity wielded so much power that he must be traceable by those who knew where to look and what to look for and cared enough to process detail like a mass spectroscopist. Neither was Guy Gibbon born heir to countless millions, the direct successor to a procession of giants.

He came from wherever it is most of us come from, the middle or the upper-middle or the upper-lower middle or the lower-upper middle or some other indefinable speck in the midrange of the interflowing striations of society (the more they are studied, the less they mean). He belonged to the Wykes entity for only eight and a half weeks, after all. Oh, the bare details

might not be too hard to come by (birth date, school record) and certain main facts (father's occupation, mother's maiden name) as well, perhaps, as a highlight or two (divorce, perhaps, or a death in the family), but a biography, a real biography, which does more than describe, which *explains* the man—and few do—now, *this* is an undertaking.

Science, it is fair to assume, can do what all the king's horses and all the king's men could not do, and totally restore a smashed egg. Given equipment enough, and time enough . . . but isn't this a way of saying, "Given money enough"? For money can be not only means, but motive. So if enough money went into the project, perhaps the last unknown, the last vestige of anonymity could be removed from a man's life story, even a young man from (as the snobs say) nowhere, no matter how briefly—though intimately—known.

The most important thing, obviously, that ever happened to Guy Gibbon in his life was his first encounter with the Wyke entity, and like many a person before and since, he had not the faintest idea he had done so. It was when he was in his late teens, and he and Sammy Stein went trespassing.

Sammy was a school sidekick, and this particular day he had a secret; he had been very insistent on the day's outing, but refused to say why. He was a burly-shouldered, good-natured, reasonably chinless boy whose close friendship with Guy was based almost exclusively on the attraction of opposite poles. And since, of the many kinds of fun they had had, the most fun was going trespassing; he wanted it that way on this particular occasion.

"Going trespassing," as an amusement, had more or less invented itself when they were in their early teens. They lived in a large city surrounded (unlike many today) by old suburbs, not new ones. These

included large—some, more than large—estates and mansions, and it was their greatest delight to slip through a fence or over a wall and, profoundly impressed by their own bravery, slip through field and forest, lawn and drive, like Indian scouts in settler country. Twice they had been caught, once to have dogs set on them—three boxers and two mastiffs, which certainly would have torn them to very small pieces if the boys had not been more lucky than swift—and once by a dear little old lady who swamped them sickeningly with jelly sandwiches and lonely affection. But over the saga of their adventures, their two captures served to spice the adventure, two failures out of a hundred successes (for many of these places were visited frequently) was a proud record.

So they took a trolley to the end of the line and walked a mile and went straight ahead where the road turned at a discreet *No Admittance* sign of expensive manufacture and a high degree of weathering. They proceeded through a small wild wood and came at last to an apparently unscalable granite wall.

Sammy had discovered this wall the week before, roaming alone; he had waited for Guy to accompany him before challenging it, and Guy was touched. He was also profoundly excited by the wall itself. Anything this size should have been found, conjectured about, campaigned against, battled and conquered long since. But as well as being a high wall, a long wall and mysterious, it was a distant wall, a discreet wall. No road touched it but its own driveway, which was primitive, meandering and led to ironbound, solid oak gates without a chink or crack to peek through.

They could not climb it nor breach it—but they crossed it. An ancient maple on this side held hands with a chestnut over the crown of the wall, and they went over like a couple of squirrels.

They had, in their ghostlike way, haunted many an

elaborate property, but never had they seen such maintenance, such manicure, such polish of a piece of land and, as Sammy said, awed out of his usual brashness, as they stood in a solid marble pergola overlooking green plush acres of rolling lawn, copses of carven boxwood, parklike woods and streams with little Japanese bridges and, in their bends, humorous little rock gardens: "And there's goddamn *miles* of it."

They had wandered a bit, that first time, and had learned that there were after all some people there. They saw a tractor far away, pulling a slanted gang of mowers across one of the green plush fields. (The owners doubtless called it a lawn; it was a field.) The machines, rare in that time, cut a swath all of thirty feet wide. "And that," Sammy said, convulsing them, "ain't hay." And then they had seen the house. . . .

Well, a glimpse. Breaking out of the woods, Guy had felt himself snatched back. "House up there," said Sammy. "Someone'll see us." There was a confused impression of a white hill that was itself the house, or part of it; towers, turrets, castellations, crenellations; a fairy-tale palace set in this legendary landscape. They had not been able to see it again; it was so placed that it could be approached nowhere secretly nor even spied upon. They were struck literally speechless by the sight and for most of an hour had nothing to say, and that expressible only by wags of the head. Ultimately they referred to it as "the shack," and it was in this vein that they later called their final discovery "the ol' swimmin' hole."

It was across a creek and over a wooded hill. Two more hills rose to meet the wood, and cupped between the three was a pond, perhaps a lake. It was roughly L-shaped, and all around it were shadowed inlets, grottoes, inconspicuous stone steps leading here to a rustic pavilion set about with flowers, there to a concealed forest glade harboring a tiny formal garden.

But the lake, the ol' swimmin' hole . . .

They went swimming, splashing as little as possible and sticking to the shore. They explored two inlets to the right (a miniature waterfall and a tiny beach of obviously imported golden sand) and three to the left (a square-cut one, lined with tile the color of patina, with a black glass diving tower overhanging water that must have been dredged to twenty feet; a little beach of snow-white sand; and one they dared not enter for fear of harming the fleet of perfect sailing ships, none more than a foot long, which lay at anchor; but they trod water until they were bone cold, gawking at the miniature model waterfront with little pushcarts in the street, and lamp posts, and old-fashioned houses) and then, weary, hungry and awestruck, they had gone home.

And Sammy cracked the secret he had been keeping—the thing which he felt made this day an occasion: he was to go wild-hairing off the next day in an effort to join Chennault in China.

Guy Gibbon, overwhelmed, made the only gesture he could think of: he devotedly swore he would not go trespassing again until Sammy got back.

"Death from choriocarcinoma," Dr. Weber began, "is the result of . . ."

"But he won't die," she said. "I won't let him."

"My dear," Dr. Weber was a small man with round shoulders and a hawk's face. "I don't mean to be unkind, but I can use all the euphemisms and kindle all the false hope, or I can do as you have asked me to do—explain the condition and make a prognosis. I can't do both."

Dr. Rathburn said gently, "Why don't you go and lie down? I'll come when we've finished here and tell you all about it."

"I don't want to lie down," she said fiercely. "And I wasn't asking you to spare me anything, Dr. Weber."

I simply said I would not let him die. There's nothing in that statement which keeps you from telling me the truth."

Keogh smiled. Weber caught him at it and was startled; Keogh saw his surprise. "I know her better than you do," he said, with a touch of pride. "You don't have to pull any punches."

"Thanks, Keogh," she said. She leaned forward. "Go ahead, Dr. Weber."

Weber looked at her. Snatched from his work two thousand miles away, brought to a place he had never known existed, of a magnificence which attacked his confidence in his own eyes, meeting a woman of power—every sort of power—quite beyond his experience . . . Weber had thought himself beyond astonishment. Shock, grief, fear, deprivation like hers he had seen before, of course; what doctor has not? but when Keogh had told her baldly that this disease killed in six weeks, *always*, she had flinched, closed her eyes for an interminable moment and had then said softly, "Tell us everything you can about this—this disease, doctor." And she had added, for the first time, "He isn't going to die. I won't let him;" and the way she held her head, the way her full voice handled the words, he almost believed her. Heaven knows he wished he could. And so he found he could be astonished yet again.

He made an effort to detach himself and became not a man, not this particular patient's doctor, but a sort of source book. He began again:

"Death from choriocarcinoma is a little unlike other deaths from malignancies. Ordinarily a cancer begins locally and sends its chains and masses of wild cells growing through the organ on which it began. Death can result from the failure of that organ; liver, kidney, brain, what have you. Or the cancer suddenly breaks up and spreads through the body, starting colonies

throughout the system. This is called metastasis. Death results then from the loss of efficiency of many organs instead of just one. Of course, both these things can happen—the almost complete impairment of the originally cancerous organ and metastatic effects at the same time.

“Chorio, on the other hand, doesn’t originally involve a vital organ. Vital to the species, perhaps, but not to the individual.” He permitted himself a dry smile. “This is probably a startling concept to most people in this day and age, but it’s nonetheless true. However, sex cells, at their most basic and primitive, have peculiarities not shared by other body cells.

“Have you ever heard of the condition known as ectopic pregnancy?” He directed his question at Keogh, who nodded. “A fertilized ovum fails to descend to the uterus; instead it attaches itself to the side of the very fine tube between the ovaries and the womb. And at first everything proceeds well with it—and this is the point I want you to grasp—because in spite of the fact that only the uterus is truly specialized for this work, the tube wall not only supports the growing ovum but also feeds it. It actually forms what we call a counter-placenta; it enfolds the early fetus and nurtures it. The fetus, of course, has a high survival value and is able to get along quite well on the plasma which the counterplacenta supplies it with. And it grows—it grows fantastically. Since the tube is very fine—you’d have difficulty getting the smallest sewing needle up through it—it can no longer contain the growing fetus, and ruptures. Unless it is removed at that time, the tissues outside will quite as readily take on the work of a real placenta and uterus, and in six or seven months, if the mother survives that long, will create havoc in the abdomen.

“All right then: back to chorio. Since the cells involved are sex cells and cancerous to boot, they

divide and redivide wildly, without pattern or special form. They develop in an infinite variety of shapes and sizes and forms. The law of averages dictates that a certain number of these—and the number of distorted cells is astronomical—resemble fertilized ova. Some of them resemble them so closely that I personally would not enjoy the task of distinguishing between them and the real thing. However, the body as a whole is not that particular; anything which even roughly resembles a fertilized egg cell is capable of commanding that counterplacenta.

“Now consider the source of these cells—physiologically speaking, gland tissue—a mass of capillary tubes and blood vessels. Each and every one of these does its best to accept and nurture these fetal imitations, down to the tiniest of them. The thin walls of the capillaries, however, break down easily under such an effort, and the imitations—selectively, the best of them, too, because the tissues yield most readily to them—they pass into the capillaries and then into the bloodstream.

“There is one place and only one place where they can be combed out; and it’s a place rich in oxygen, lymph, blood and plasma: the lungs. The lungs enthusiastically take on the job of forming placentae for these cells and nurturing them. But for every segment of lung given over to gestating an imitation fetus, there is one less segment occupied with the job of oxygenating blood. Ultimately the lungs fail, and death results from oxygen starvation.”

Rathburn spoke up. “For years chorio was regarded as a lung disease, and the cancerous gonads as a sort of side effect.”

“But lung cancer . . .” Keogh began to object.

“It isn’t lung cancer, don’t you see? Given enough time, it might be, through metastasis. But there is never enough time. Chorio doesn’t have to wait for

that, to kill. That's why it's so swift." He tried not to look at the girl and failed; he said it anyway: "And certain."

"Just exactly how do you treat it?"

Weber raised his hands and let them fall. It was precisely the gesture Rathburn had made earlier, and Keogh wondered distantly whether they taught it in medical schools. "Something to kill the pain. Orchidectomy might make the patient last a little longer, by removing the supply of wild cells to the bloodstream. But it wouldn't save him. Metastasis has already taken place by the time the first symptom appears. The cancer becomes generalized . . . perhaps the lung condition is only God's mercy."

"What's 'orchidectomy'?" asked Keogh.

"Amputation of the—uh—source," said Rathburn uncomfortably.

"No," cried the girl.

Keogh sent her a pitying look. There was that about him which was cynical, sophisticated and perhaps coldly angry at anyone who lived as he could never live, had what he could never have. It was a stirring of the grave ancient sin which old Cap'n Gamaliel had isolated in his perspicacious thoughts. Sure, amputate, if it'll help, he thought. What do you think you're preserving—his virility? What good's it to you now? . . . But sending her the look, he encountered something different from the romantically based horror and shock he expected. Her thick level brows were drawn together, her whole face intense with taut concentration. "Let me think," she said, oddly.

"You really should . . ." Rathburn began, but she shushed him with an impatient gesture. The three men exchanged a glance and settled back; it was as if someone, something, had told them clearly and specifically to wait. What they were waiting for, they could not imagine.

The girl sat with her eyes closed. A minute crawled by. "Daddy used to say," she said, so quietly that she must surely be talking to herself, "that there's always a way. All you have to do is think of it."

There was another long silence, and she opened her eyes. There was a burning down in them somewhere; it made Keogh uneasy. She said, "And once he told me that I could have anything I wanted; all it had to be was . . . possible. And . . . the only way you can find out if a thing is impossible is to try it."

"That wasn't Sam Wyke," said Keogh. "That was Keogh."

She wet her lips and looked at them each in turn. She seemed not to see them at all. "I'm not going to let him die," she said. "You'll see."

Sammy Stein came back two years later on leave, and full of plans to join the Army Air Force. He'd had, as he himself said, the hell kicked out of him in China and a lot of the hellishness as well. But there was enough of the old Sammy left to make wild wonderful plans about going trespassing; and they knew just where they were going. The new Sammy, however, demanded a binge and a broad first.

Guy, two years out of high school, working for a living and by nature neither binger nor wencher, went along only too gladly. Sam seemed to have forgotten about the "old" swimmin' hole" at first, and halfway through the evening, in a local bar-and-dance emporium, Guy was about to despair of his ever remembering it when Sam himself brought it up, recalling to Guy that he had once written Sam a letter asking Sam if it had really happened. Guy had, in his turn, forgotten the letter, and after that they had a good time with "remember when"—and they made a plans to go trespassing the very next day and bring a lunch. And start early.

Then there was a noisy involvement with some girls and a lot more drinks, and out of the haze and movement somewhere after midnight, Guy emerged on a sidewalk looking at Sammy shoveling a girl into a taxicab. "Hey!" he called out, "what about the you know, ol' swimmin' hole?"

"Call me Abacus, you can count on me," Sammy said and laughed immoderately. The girl with him pulled at his arm; he shook her off and weaved over to Guy. "Listen," he said and gave a distorted wink, "if this makes—and it will—I'm starting no early starts. Tell you what, you go on out there and meet me by that sign says keep out or we'll castigate you. Say eleven o'clock. If I can't make it by then I'm dead or something." He bellowed at the cab, "You gon' kill me, honey?" and the girl called back, "I will if you don't get into this taxi." "See what I mean?" said Sammy in a grand drunken non sequitor. "I got to go get killed." He zigged away, needing no zag because even walking sidewise he reached the cab in a straight line, and Guy saw no more of him that leave.

That was hard to take, mostly because there was no special moment at which he knew Sammy wasn't coming. He arrived ten minutes late, after making a superhuman effort to get there. His stomach was sour from the unaccustomed drinking and he was sandy-eyed and ache-jointed from lack of sleep. He knew that the greater probability was that Sammy had not arrived yet or would not at all; yet the nagging possibility existed that he had come early and gone straight in. Guy waited around for a full hour, and some more minutes until the little road was clear of traffic and sounds of traffic, and then plunged alone into the woods, past the no trespassing sign, and in to the wall. He had trouble finding the two trees, and once over the wall, he could not get his bearings for a while; he was pleased, of course, to find the unbelievably per-

fect lawns still there by the flawless acre, the rigidly controlled museums of carven box, the edge-trimmed, rolled-gravel walks meandering prettily through the woods. The pleasure, however, was no more than confirmation of his memory and went no further; the day was spoiled.

Guy reached the lake at nearly one o'clock, hot, tired, ravenously hungry and unpleasantly nervous. The combination hit him in the stomach and made it echo; he sat down on the bank and ate. He wolfed down the food he had brought for himself and Sammy's as well—odds and ends carelessly tossed into a paper sack in the bleary early hours. The cake was moldy but he ate it anyway. The orange juice was warm and had begun to ferment. And stubbornly, he determined to swim because that was what he had come for.

He chose the beach with the golden sand. Under a thick cover of junipers he found a stone bench and table. He undressed here and scuttled across the beach and into the water.

He had meant it to be a mere dip, so he could say he'd done it. But around the little headland to the left was the rectangular cove with the diving platform; and he remembered the harbor of model ships; and then movement diagonally across the foot of the lake's *L* caught his eye, and he saw models—not the anchored ships this time, but racing sloops, which put out from an inlet and crossed its mouth and sailed in again; they must be mounted on some sort of underwater wheel or endless chain, and they moved as the breeze took them. He all but boiled straight across to them, then decided to be wise and go round.

He swam to the left and the rocky shore and worked his way along it. Clinging close (the water seemed bottomless here) he rounded the point and came face to face (literally; they touched) with a girl.

She was young—near his age—and his first impression was of eyes of too complex an architecture, blue white teeth with pointed canines quite unlike the piano-key regularity considered beautiful in these times and a wide cape of rich brown hair afloat around her shoulders. By then his gasp was completed, and in view of the fact that in gasping he had neglected to remove his mouth from the water, he was shut off from outside impressions for a strangling time until he felt a firm grasp on his left biceps and found himself returned to the side of the rock.

"Th—thanks," he said hoarsely as she swam back a yard and trod water. "I'm not supposed to be here," he added inanely.

"I guess I'm not either. But I thought you lived here. I thought you were a faun."

"Boy, am I glad to hear that. I mean about you. All I am is a trespasser. Boy."

"I'm not a boy."

"It was just a finger of speech," he said, using one of the silly expressions which come to a person as he grows, and blessedly pass. She seemed not to react to it at all, for she said gravely, "You have the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen. They are made of aluminum. And your hair is all wiggly."

He could think of nothing to say to that, but tried; all that emerged was, "Well, it's early yet," and suddenly they were laughing together. She was so strange, so different. She spoke in a grave, unaccented and utterly incautious idiom as if she thought strange thoughts and spoke them right out. "Also," she said, "you have lovely lips. They're pale blue. You ought to get out of the water."

"I can't!"

She considered that for a moment, treading away from him and then back to the yard's distance. "Where are your things?"

He pointed across the narrow neck of the lake which he had circumnavigated.

"Wait for me over there," she said and suddenly swam close, so close she could dip her chin and look straight into his eyes. "You got to," she said fiercely.

"Oh, I will," he promised and struck out for the opposite shore. She hung to the rock, watching him.

Swimming, reaching hard, stretching for distance warmed him, and the chill and its accompanying vague ache diminished. Then he had a twinge of stomach-ache, and he drew up his knees to ease it. When he tried to extend himself again, he could, but it hurt too much. He drew up his knees again, and the pain followed inward so that to flex again was out of the question. He drew his knees up still tighter, and tighter still followed the pain. He needed air badly by then, threw up his head, tried to roll over on his back; but with his knees drawn up, everything came out all wrong. He inhaled at last because he had to, but the air was gone away somewhere; he floundered upward for it until the pressure in his ears told him he was swimming downward. Blackness came upon him and receded and came again; he let it come for a tired instant and was surrounded by light and drew one lungful of air and one of water and got the blackness again; this time it stayed with him. . . .

Still beautiful in her bed, but morphine-clouded, fly-papared and unstruggling in viscous sleep, he lay with monsters swarming in his veins. . . .

Quietly, in a corner of the room, she spoke with Keogh:

"You don't understand me. You didn't understand me yesterday when I cried out at the idea of that—that operation. Keogh, I love him, but I'm *me*. Loving him doesn't mean I've stopping thinking. Loving him means I'm more me than ever, not less. It means I

can do anything I did before, only more, only better. That's why I fell in love with him. That's why I am in love with him. Weren't you ever in love, Keogh?"

He looked at the way her hair fell and the earnest placement of her thick soft brows, and he said, "I haven't thought much about it."

"There's always a way. All you have to do is think of it," she quoted. "Keogh, I've accepted what Dr. Rathburn said. After I left you yesterday I went to the library and tore the heart out of some books. . . . They're right, Rathburn and Weber. And I've thought and I've thought . . . trying the way daddy would, to turn everything upside down and backward, to look for a new way of thinking. He won't die, Keogh; I'm not going to let him die."

"You said you accepted . . ."

"Oh, part of him. Most of him, if you like. We all die, bit by bit, all the time, and it doesn't bother us because most of the dead parts are replaced. He'll . . . he'll lose more parts sooner, but—after it's over, he'll be himself again." She said it with superb confidence—perhaps it was childlike. If so, it was definitely not childish.

"You have an idea," said Keogh positively. As he had pointed out to the doctors, he knew her.

"All those—those things in his blood," she said quietly. "The struggle they go through . . . they're trying to survive; did you ever think of it that way, Keogh? They want to live. They want most terribly to go on living."

"I hadn't thought about it."

"His body wants them to live too. It welcomes them wherever they lodge. Dr. Weber said so."

"You've got hold of something," said Keogh flatly, "and whatever it is I don't think I like it."

"I don't want you to like it," she said in the same strange quiet voice. He looked swiftly at her and saw

again the burning deep in her eyes. He had to look away. She said, "I want you to hate it. I want you to fight it. You have one of the most wonderful minds I have ever known, Keogh, and I want you to think up every argument you can think of against it. For every argument I'll find an answer, and then we'll know what to do."

"You'd better go ahead," he said reluctantly.

"I had a pretty bad quarrel with Dr. Weber this morning," she said suddenly.

"This m . . . when?" He looked at his watch; it was still early.

"About three, maybe four. In his room. I went there and woke him up."

"Look, you don't do things like that to Weber!"

"I do. Anyway, he's gone."

He rose to his feet, the rare bright patches of anger showing in his cheeks. He took a breath, let it out, and sat down again. "You'd better tell me about it."

"In the library," she said, "there's a book on genetics, and it mentions some experiments on Belgian hares. The does were impregnated without sperm, with some sort of saline or alkaline solution."

"I remember something about it." He was well used to her circuitous way of approaching something important. She built conversational points, not like a hired contractor, but like an architect. Sometimes she brought in portions of her lumber and stacked them beside the structure. If she ever did that, it was material she needed and would use. He waited.

"The does gave birth to baby rabbits, all female. The interesting thing was that they were identical to each other and to the mother. Even the blood-vessel patterns in the eyeball were so similar that an expert might be fooled by photographs of them. 'Impossibly similar' is what one of the experimenters called it. They had to be identical because everything they

inherited was from the mother. I woke Dr. Weber up to tell him about that."

"And he told you he'd read the book."

"He wrote it," she said gently. "And then I told him that if he could do that with a Belgian hare, he could do it with"—she nodded toward her big bed—"him."

Then she was quiet while Keogh rejected the idea, found it stuck to his mind's hand, not to be shaken off; brought it to his mind's eye and shuddered away from it, shook again and failed, slowly brought it close and turned it over and turned it again.

"Take one of those—those things like fertilized ova—make it grow . . ."

"You don't *make* it grow. It wants desperately to grow. And not one of them, Keogh. You have thousands. You have hundreds more every hour."

"Oh my God."

"It came to me when Dr. Rathburn suggested the operation. It came to me all at once, a miracle. If you love someone that much," she said, looking at the sleeper, "miracles happen. But you have to be willing to help them happen." She looked at him directly with an intensity that made him move back in his chair. "I can have anything I want—all it has to be is possible. We just have to make it possible. That's why I went to Dr. Weber this morning. To ask him."

"He said it wasn't possible."

"He said that at first. After a half-hour or so he said the odds against it were in the billions or trillions . . . but you see, as soon as he said that, he was saying it was possible."

"What did you do then?"

"I dared him to try."

"And that's why he left?"

"Yes."

"You're mad," he said before he could stop himself. She seemed not to resent it. She sat calmly, waiting.

"Look," said Keogh at last, "Weber said those distorted—uh—*things* were *like* fertilized ova. He never said they were. He could have said—well, I'll say it for him—they're *not* fertilized ova."

"But he did say they were—some of them, anyway, and especially those that reached the lungs—were very much like ova. How close do you have to get before there's no real difference at all?"

"It can't be. It just can't."

"Weber said that. And I asked him if he had ever tried."

"All right, all right! It can't happen, but just to keep this silly argument going, suppose you got something that would grow. You won't, of course. But if you did, how would you keep it growing. It has to be fed, it has to be kept at a certain critical temperature, a certain amount of acid or alkali will kill it. . . . You don't just plant something like that in the yard."

"Already they've taken ova from one cow, planted them in another and gotten calves. There's a man in Australia who plans to raise blooded cattle from scrub cows that way."

"You *have* done your homework."

"Oh, that isn't all. There's a Dr. Carrel in New Jersey who has been able to keep chicken tissue alive for months—he says indefinitely—in a nutrient solution, in a temperature-controlled jar in his lab. It grows, Keogh! It grows so much he has to cut it away every once in a while."

"This is crazy. This is—it's insane," he growled. "And what do you think you'll get if you bring one of these monsters to term?"

"We'll bring thousands of them to term," she said composedly. "And one of them will be—*him*." She leaned forward abruptly, and her even tone of voice

broke; a wildness grew through her face and voice, and though it was quiet, it shattered him: "It will be his flesh, the pattern of him, his own substance grown again. His hair, Keogh. His fingerprints. His—eyes. His—his *self*."

"I can't . . ." Keogh shook himself like a wet spaniel, but it changed nothing; he was still here, she, the bed, the sleeper and this dreadful, this inconceivably horrible, wrong idea.

She smiled then, put out her hand and touched him; incredibly, it was a mother's smile, warm and comforting, a mother's loving, protective touch; her voice was full of affection. "Keogh, if it won't work, it won't work, no matter what we do. Then you'll be right. I think it will work. It's what I want. Don't you want me to have what I want?"

He had to smile, and she smiled back. "You're a young devil," he said ardently. "Got me coming and going, haven't you? Why did you want me to fight it?"

"I didn't," she said, "but if you fight me you'll come up with problems nobody else could possibly think of, and once we've thought of them, we'll be ready, don't you see? I'll fight with you, Keogh," she said, shifting her strange bright spectrum from tenderness to a quiet, convinced, invincible certainty, "I'll fight with you, I'll lift and carry, I'll buy and sell and kill if I have to, but I am going to bring him back. You know something, Keogh?"

"What?"

She waved her hand in a gesture that included him, the room, the castle and grounds and all the other castles and grounds; the pseudonyms, the ships and trains, the factories and exchanges, the mountains and acres and mines and banks and the thousands upon thousands of people which, taken together, were Wyke: "I always knew that all this *was*," she said,

"and I've come to understand that this is mine. But I used to wonder, sometimes, what it was all *for*. Now I know. Now I know."

A mouth on his mouth, a weight on his stomach. He felt boneless and nauseated, limp as grease drooling. The light around him was green, and all shapes blurred.

The mouth on his mouth, the weight on his stomach, a breath of air, welcome but too warm, too moist. He needed it desperately but did not like it and found a power plant full of energy to gather it up in his lungs and fling it away; but his weakness so filtered all that effort that it emerged in a faint bubbling sigh.

The mouth on his mouth again and the weight on his stomach and another breath. He tried to turn his head but someone held him by the nose. He blew out the needed, unsatisfactory air and replaced it by a little gust of his own inhalation. On this he coughed; it was too rich, pure, too good. He coughed as one does over a pickle barrel; good air hurt his lungs.

He felt his head and shoulders lifted, shifted, by which he learned that he had been flat on his back on stone, or something flat and quite that hard, and was now on smooth firm softness. The good sharp air came and went, his weak coughs fewer, until he fell into a dazed peace. The face that bent over his was too close to focus, or he had lost the power to focus; either way, he didn't care. Drowsily he stared up into the blurred brightness of that face and listened uncritically to the voice. . . .

. . . The voice crooning wordlessly and comfortingly, and somehow, in its wordlessness, creating new expressions for joy and delight for which words would not do. Then after all there were words, half-sung, half-whispered; and he couldn't catch them, and he couldn't catch them and then . . . and then he was

sure he heard: "How could it be, such a magic as that: all this and the eyes as well . . ." Then, demanding, "You are the shape of the not-you: tell me, are *you* in there?"

He opened his eyes wide and saw her face clearly at last and the dark hair, and the eyes were green—true deep sea green. Her tangled hair, drying, crowned her like vines, and the leafy roof close above seemed part of her and the green eyes, and threw green light on the unaccountably blonde transparency of her cheeks. He genuinely did not know, at the moment, what she was. She had said to him (was it years ago?) "I thought you were a faun. . . ." He had not, at the moment, much consciousness, not to say whimsy, at his command; she was simply something unrelated to anything in his experience.

He was aware of griping, twisting pain rising, filling, about to explode in his upper abdomen. Some thick wire within him had kinked, and knowing well that it should be unbent, he made a furious, rebellious effort and pulled it through. The explosion came, but in nausea, not in agony. Convulsively he turned his head, surged upward and let it go.

He saw with too much misery to be horrified the bright vomit surging on and around her knee and running into the crevice between thigh and calf where she had her leg bent and tucked under her, and the clots left there as the fluid ran away. And she . . .

She sat where she was, held his head, cradled him in her arms, soothed him and crooned to him and said that was good, good; he'd feel better now. The weakness floored him and receded; then shakily he pressed away from her, sat up, bowed his head and gasped for breath. "Whooo," he said.

"Boy," she said; and she said it in exact concert with him. He clung to his shins and wiped the nausea tears from his left eye, then his right, on his kneecap.

"Boy, oh, boy," he said, and she said it with him in concert.

So at last he looked at her.

He looked at her and would never forget what he saw and exactly the way it was. Late sunlight made into lace by the bower above clothed her; she leaned toward him, one small hand flat on the ground, one slim supporting arm straight and straight down; her weight turned up that shoulder and her head tilted toward it as if drawn down by the heavy darkness of her hair. It gave a sense of yielding, as if she were fragile, which he knew she was not. Her other hand lay open across one knee, the palm up and the fingers not quite relaxed, as if they held something; and indeed they did, for a spot of light, gold turned coral by her flesh, lay in her palm. She held it just so, just right, unconsciously, and her hand held that rare knowledge that closed, a hand may not give or receive. For his lifetime he had it all, each tiniest part, even the gleaming big toenail at the underside of her other calf. And she was smiling, and her complex eyes adored.

Guy Gibbon knew his life's biggest moment during the moment itself, a rarity in itself, and of all times of life, it was time to say the unforgettable, for anything he said now would be.

He shuddered, and then smiled back at her. "Oh . . . boy," he breathed.

And again they were laughing together until, puzzled, he stopped and asked, "Where am I?"

She would not answer, so he closed his eyes and puzzled it out. Pine bower . . . undress somewhere . . . swimming. Oh, swimming. And then across the lake, and he had met . . . He opened his eyes and looked at her and said, "You." Then swimming back, cold, his gut full of too much food and warm juice

and moldy cake to boot, and, ". . . You must have saved my life."

"Well, somebody had to. You were dead."

"I should've been."

"No!" she cried. "Don't you ever say that again!" And he could see she was absolutely serious.

"I only meant, for stupidity. I ate a lot of junk and some cake I think was moldy. Too much, when I was hot and tired, and then like a bonehead I went right into the water, so anybody who does that deserves to . . ."

"I meant it," she said levelly, "never again. Didn't you ever hear of the old tradition of the field of battle, when one man saved another's life, that life became his to do what he wanted with?"

"What do you want to do with mine?"

"That depends," she said thoughtfully. "You have to give it. I can't just take it." She knelt then and sat back on her heels, her hands trailing pine needles across the bower's paved stone floor. She bowed her head and her hair swung forward. He thought she was watching him through it; he could not be sure.

He said, and the thought grew so large that it quelled his voice and made him whisper, "Do you want it?"

"Oh, yes," she said, whispering too. When he moved to her and put her hair back to see if she was watching him, he found her eyes closed, and tears pressed through. He reached for her gently, but before he could touch her she sprang up and straight at the leafy wall. Her long golden body passed through it without a sound and seemed to hang suspended outside; then it was gone. He put his head through and saw her flashing along under green water. He hesitated, then got an acrid whiff of his own vomit. The water looked clean and the golden sand just what he ached to scrub himself with. He climbed out of the

bower and floundered clumsily down the bank and into the water.

After his first plunge he came up and spun about, looking for her, but she was gone.

Numbly he swam to the tiny beach and, kneeling, scoured himself with the fine sand. He dived and rinsed, and then (hoping) scrubbed himself all over again. And rinsed. But he did not see her.

He stood in the late rays of the sun to dry and looked off across the lake. His heart leaped when he saw white movement and sank again as he saw it was just the wheel of boats bobbing and sliding there.

He plodded up to the bower—now at last he saw it was the one behind which he had undressed—and he sank down on the bench.

This was a place where tropical fish swam in ocean water where there was no ocean and where fleets of tiny perfect boats sailed with no one sailing them and no one watching and where priceless statues stood hidden in clipped and barbered glades deep in the woods and—and he hadn't seen it all; what other impossibilities were possible in this impossible place?

And besides, he'd been sick. (He wrinkled his nostrils.) Damn near . . . drowned. Out of his head for sure, for a while anyway. She couldn't be real. Hadn't he noticed a greenish cast to her flesh, or was that just the light? . . . Anybody who could make a place like this, run a place like this, could jimmy up some kind of machine to hypnotize you like in the science fiction stories.

He stirred uneasily. Maybe someone was watching him even now.

Hurriedly, he began to dress.

So she wasn't real. Or maybe all of it wasn't real. He'd bumped into that other trespasser across the lake there, and that was real, but then when he'd almost drowned, he'd dreamed up the rest.

Only—he touched his mouth. He'd dreamed up someone blowing the breath back into him. He'd heard about that somewhere, but it sure wasn't what they were teaching this year at the Y.

*You are the shape of the not-you. Are you in there?*  
What did that mean?

He finished dressing dazedly. He muttered, "What'd I hafta go an' eat that goddamn cake for?" He wondered what he would tell Sammy. If she wasn't real, Sammy wouldn't know what he was talking about. If she was real there's only one thing he would talk about, yes, and from then on. You mean you had her in that place and all you did was throw up on her? No—he wouldn't tell Sammy. Or anybody.

And he'd be a bachelor all his life.

Boy, oh, boy. What an introduction. First she has to save your life and then you don't know what to say and then, oh, look what you had to go and do. But anyway—she wasn't real.

He wondered what her name was. Even if she wasn't real. Lots of people don't use their real names.

He climbed out of the bower and crossed the silent pine carpet behind it, and he shouted. It was not a word at all, and had nothing about it that tried to make it one.

She was standing there waiting for him. She wore a quiet brown dress and low heels and carried a brown leather pocketbook, and her hair was braided and tied neatly and sedately in a coronet. She looked, too, as if she had turned down some inward tone control so that her skin did not radiate. She looked ready to disappear, not into thin air, but into a crowd—any crowd, as soon as she could get close to one. In a crowd he would have walked right past her, certainly, but for the shape of her eyes. She stepped up to him quickly and laid her hand on his cheek and laughed up

at him. Again he saw the whiteness of those unusual eyeteeth, so sharp . . . "You're blushing!" she said.

No blusher in history was ever stopped by that observation. He asked, "Which way do you go?"

She looked at his eyes, one, the other, both, quickly; then folded her long hands together around the strap of her pocketbook and looked down at them.

"With you," she said softly.

This was only one of the many things she said to him, moment by moment, which gained meaning for him as time went on. He took her back to town and to dinner and then to the West Side address she gave him and they stood outside it all night talking. In six weeks they were married.

"How could I argue?" said Weber to Dr. Rathburn.

They stood together watching a small army of workmen swarming over the gigantic stone barn a quarter-mile from the castle, which, incidentally, was invisible from this point and unknown to the men. Work had begun at three the previous afternoon, continued all night. There was nothing, nothing at all that Dr. Weber had specified which was not only given him, but on the site or already installed.

"I know," said Rathburn, who did.

"Not only, how could I argue," said Weber, "why should I? A man has plans, ambitions. That Keogh, what an approach! That's the first thing he went after—my plans for myself. That's where he starts. And suddenly everything you ever wanted to do or be or have is handed to you or promised to you, and no fooling about the promise either."

"Oh, no. They don't need to fool anybody. . . . You want to pass a prognosis?"

"You mean on the youngster there?" He looked at Rathburn. "Oh—that's not what you mean. . . . You're asking me if I can bring one of those surrogate

fetuses to term. An opinion like that would make a damn fool out of a man, and this is no job for a damn fool. All I can tell you is, I tried it—and that is something I wouldn't've dreamed of doing if it hadn't been for her and her crazy idea. I left here at four in the morning with some throat smears, and by nine I had a half-dozen of them isolated and in nutrient solution. Beef blood plasma—the quickest thing I could get ready. And I got mitosis. They divided, and in a few hours I could see two of 'em dimpling to form the gastrophore. That was evidence enough to get going; that's all I think and that's all I told them on the phone. And by the time I got here," he added, waving toward the big barn, "there's a research lab four-fifths built, big enough for a city medical center. Argue?" he demanded, returning to Dr. Rathburn's original question. "How could I argue? Why should I? . . . And that *girl*. She's a force, like gravity. She can turn on so much pressure, and I mean by herself and personally, that she could probably get anything in the world she wanted even if she didn't own it, the world I mean. Put that in the northeast entrance!" he belowed at a foreman. "I'll be down to show you just where it goes." He turned to Rathburn; he was a man on fire. "I got to go."

"Anything I can do," said Dr. Rathburn, "just say it."

"That's the wonderful part of it," said Weber. "That's what everybody around here keeps saying, and they mean it!" He trotted down toward the barn, and Rathburn turned toward the castle.

About a month after his last venture at trespassing, Guy Gibbon was coming home from work when a man at the corner put away a newspaper and, still folding it, said, "Gibbon?"

"That's right," said Guy, a little sharply.

The man looked him up and down, quickly, but giving an impression of such thoroughness, efficiency and experience that Guy would not have been surprised to learn that the man had not only catalogued his clothes and their source, their state of maintenance and a computation therefrom of his personal habits, but also his state of health and even his blood type. "My name's Keogh," said the man. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"No."

"Sylva never mentioned the name?"

"Sylva! N-no, she didn't."

"Let's go somewhere and have a drink. I'd like to talk to you." Something had pleased this man; Guy wondered what. "Well, okay," he said. "Only I don't drink much, but well, okay."

They found a bar in the neighborhood with booths in the back. Keogh had a Scotch and soda, and Guy, after some hesitation, ordered beer. Guy said, "You know her?"

"Most of her life. Do you?"

"What? Well, sure. We're going to get married." He looked studiously into his beer and said uncomfortably, "Who are you anyway, Mr. Keogh?"

"You might say," said Keogh, "I'm *in loco parentis*." He waited for a response, then added, "Sort of a guardian."

"She never said anything about a guardian."

"I can understand that. What has she told you about herself?"

Guy's discomfort descended to a level of shyness, diffidence, even a touch of fear—which did not alter the firmness of his words, however they were spoken. "I don't know you, Mr. Keogh. I don't think I ought to answer any questions about Sylva. Or me. Or anything." He looked up at the man. Keogh searched deeply, then smiled. It was an unpracticed and appar-

ently slightly painful process with him, but it was genuine for all that. "Good!" he barked, and rose. "Come on." He left the booth and Guy, more than a little startled, followed. They went to the phone booth in the corner. Keogh dropped in a nickel, dialed and waited, his eyes fixed on Guy. Then Guy had to listen to one side of the conversation.

"I'm here with Guy Gibbon." (Guy had to notice that Keogh identified himself only with his voice.)

. . . "Of course I knew about it. That's a silly question, girl."

. . . "Because it *is* my business. *You* are my business."

. . . "Stop it? I'm not trying to stop anything. I just have to know, that's all."

. . . "All right. All right. . . . He's here. He won't talk about you or anything, which is good. Yes, very good. Will you please tell him to open up?"

And he handed the receiver to a startled Guy, who said tremulously, "Uh, hello," to it while watching Keogh's impassive face.

Her voice suffused and flooded him, changed this whole unsettling experience to something different and good. "Guy, darling."

"Sylva . . ."

"It's all right. I should have told you sooner, I guess. It had to come some time. Guy, you can tell Keogh anything you like. Anything he asks."

"Why, honey? Who is he, anyway?"

There was a pause, then a strange little laugh. "He can explain that better than I can. You want us to be married, Guy?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, all right then. Nobody can change that, nobody but you. And listen, Guy, I'll live anywhere, any way you want to live. That's the real truth and all of it, do you believe me?"

"I always believe you."

"All right then. So that's what we'll do. Now you go and talk to Keogh. Tell him anything he wants to know. He has to do the same. I love you, Guy."

"Me too," said Guy, watching Keogh's face. "Well, okay then," he added when she said nothing further. "Bye." He hung up."

He and Keogh had a long talk.

"It hurts him," she whispered to Dr. Rathburn.

"I know." He shook his head sympathetically. "There's just so much morphine you can ram into a man, though."

"Just a little more?"

"Maybe a little," he said sadly. He went to his bag and got the needle. Sylva kissed the sleeping man tenderly and left the room. Keogh was waiting for her.

He said, "This has got to stop, girl."

"Why?" she responded ominously.

"Let's get out of here."

She had known Keogh so long and so well that she was sure he had no surprises for her. But this voice, this look, these were something new in Keogh. He held the door for her, so she preceded him through it and then went where he silently led.

They left the castle and took the path through a heavy copse and over the brow of the hill which overlooked the barn. The parking lot, which had once been a barnyard, was full of automobiles. A white ambulance approached; another was unloading at the northeast platform. A muffled generator purred somewhere behind the building, and smoke rose from the stack of the new stone boiler room at the side. They both looked avidly at the building but did not comment. The path took them along the crest of the hill and down toward the lake. They went to a small forest clearing in which stood an eight-foot Diana, the hunt-

ress Diana, chaste and fleet-footed, so beautifully finished she seemed not like marble at all, not like anything cold or static. "I always had the idea," said Keogh, "that nobody can lie anywhere near her."

She looked up at the Diana.

"Not even to themselves," said Keogh, and plumped down on a marble bench.

"Let's have it," she said.

"You want to make Guy Gibbon happen all over again. It's a crazy idea and it's a big one too. But lots of things were crazier and some bigger, and now they're commonplace. I won't argue on how crazy it is, or how big."

"What then?"

"I've been trying, the last day or so, to back 'way out, far off, get a look at this thing with some perspective. Sylva, you've forgotten something."

"Good," she said. "Oh, good. I knew you'd think of things like this before it was too late."

"So you can find a way out?" Slowly he shook his head. "Not this time. Tighten up the Wyke guts, girl, and make up your mind to quit."

"Go ahead."

"It's just this. I don't believe you're going to get your carbon copy, mind you, but you just might. I've been talking to Weber, and by God you just about might. But if you do, all you've got is a container, and nothing to fill it with. Look, girl, a man isn't blood and bone and body cells, and that's all."

He paused, until she said, "Go on, Keogh."

He demanded, "You love this guy?"

"Keogh!" She was amused.

"Whaddaya love?" he barked. "That skrinkly hair? The muscles, skin? His nat'ral equipment? The eyes, voice?"

"All that," she said composedly.

"All that, and that's all?" he demanded relentlessly.

"Because if your answer is yes, you can have what you want, and more power to you and good riddance. I don't know anything about love, but I will say this: if that's all there is to it, the hell with it."

"Well, of *course* there's more."

"Ah. And where are you going to get that, girl? Listen, a man is the skin and bone he stands in, plus what's in his head, plus what's in his heart. You mean to reproduce Guy Gibbon, but you're not going to do it by duplicating his carcass. You want to duplicate the whole man, you're going to have to make him live the same life again. And that you can't do."

She looked up at the Diana for a long time. Then, "Why not?" she breathed.

"I'll tell you why not," he said angrily. "Because first of all you have to find out *who he is*."

"I know who he is!"

He spat explosively on the green moss by the bench. It was totally uncharacteristic and truly shocking. "You don't know a particle, and I know even less. I had his back against a wall one time for better than two hours, trying to find out who he is. He's just another kid, is all. Nothing much in school, nothing much at sports, same general tastes and feelings as six zillion other ones like him. Why him, Sylva? Why him? What did you ever see in a guy like that to be worth the marrying?"

"I . . . didn't know you disliked him."

"Oh, hell, girl, I don't! I never said that. I can't—I can't even find anything to dislike!"

"You don't know him the way I do."

"There, I agree. I don't and I couldn't. Because you don't know anything either—you *feel*, but you don't *know*. If you want to see Guy Gibbon again, or a reasonable facsimile, he's going to have to live by a script from the day he's born. He'll have to duplicate every experience that this kid here ever had."

"All right," she said quietly.

He looked at her, stunned. He said, "And before he can do that, we have to write the script. And before we can write it, we have to get the material somehow. What do you expect to do—set up a foundation or something dedicated to the discovery of each and every moment this—this unnoticeable young man ever lived through? And do it secretly because while he's growing up he can't ever know? Do you know how much that would cost, how many people it would involve?"

"That would be all right," she said.

"And suppose you had it, a biography written like a script, twenty years of a lifetime, every day, every hour you could account for; now you're going to have to arrange for a child, from birth, to be surrounded by people who are going to play this script out—and who will never let anything else happen to him but what's in the script, and who will never let him know."

"That's it! That's it!" she cried.

He leaped to his feet and swore at her. He said, "I'm not planning this, you love-struck lunatic, I'm objecting to it!"

"Is there any more?" she cried eagerly. "Keogh, Keogh, try—try hard. How do we start? What do we do first? Quick, Keogh."

He looked at her, thunderstruck, and at last sank down on the bench and began to laugh weakly. She sat by him, held his hand, her eyes shining. After a time he sobered and turned to her. He drank the shine of those eyes for a while; and after, his brain began to function again . . . on Wyke business . . .

"The main source of who he is and what he's done," he said at last, "won't be with us much longer. . . . We better go tell Rathburn to get him off the morphine. He has to be able to think."

"All right," she said. "All right."

\* \* \*

When the pain got too much to permit him to remember any more, they tried a little morphine again. For a while they found a balance between recollection and agony, but the agony gained. Then they severed his spinal cord so he couldn't feel it. They brought in people—psychiatrist, stenographers, even a professional historian.

In the rebuilt barn, Weber tried animal hosts, cows even, and primates—everything he could think of. He got some results, though no good ones. He tried humans too. He couldn't cross the bridge of body tolerance; the uterus will not support an alien fetus any more than the hand will accept the graft of another's finger.

So he tried nutrient solutions. He tried a great many. Ultimately he found one that worked. It was the blood plasma of pregnant women.

He placed the best of the quasi-ova between sheets of sterilized chamois. He designed automatic machinery to drip the plasma in at arterial tempo, drain it at a venous rate, keep it at body temperature.

One day fifty of them died because of choloform used in one of the adhesives. When light seemed to affect them adversely, Weber designed containers of bakelite. When ordinary photography proved impractical he designed a new kind of film sensitive to heat, the first infrared film.

The viable fetuses he had at sixty days showed the eye spot, the spine, the buds of arms, a beating heart. Each and every one of them consumed, or was bathed in, over a gallon of plasma a day, and at one point there were one hundred and seventy-four thousand of them. Then they began to die off—some malformed, some chemically unbalanced, many for reasons too subtle even for Weber and his staff.

When he had done all he could, when he could only

wait and see, he had fetuses seven months along and growing well. There were twenty-three of them. Guy Gibbon was dead quite awhile by then, and his widow came to see Weber and tiredly put down a stack of papers and reports, urged him to read, begged him to call her as soon as he had.

He read them, he called her. He refused what she asked.

She got hold of Keogh. He refused to have anything to do with such an idea. She made him change his mind. Keogh made Weber change his mind.

The stone barn hummed with construction again and new machinery. The cold tank was four by six feet inside, surrounded by coils and sensing devices. They put her in it.

By that time the fetuses were eight and a half months along. There were four left.

One made it.

»AUTHOR'S NOTE: To the reader, but especially to the reader in his early twenties, let me ask: did you ever have the feeling that you were getting pushed around? Did you ever want to do something, and have all sorts of obstacles thrown in your way until you had to give up, while on the other hand some other thing you wanted was made easy for you? Did you ever feel that certain strangers know who you are? Did you ever meet a girl who made you explode inside, who seemed to like you—and who was mysteriously plucked out of your life, as if she shouldn't be in the script?

Well, we've all had these feelings. Yet if you've read the above, you'll allow it's a little more startling than just a story. It reads like an analogy, doesn't it? I mean, it doesn't have to be a castle, or the ol' swimmin' hole, and the names have been changed to protect the innocent . . . author.

Because it could be about time for her to wake up,

aged only two or three years for her twenty-year cold sleep. And when she meets you, it's going to be the biggest thing that ever happened to you since the last time.

# THE BALLAD OF LOST C'MELL

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BY CORDWAINER SMITH (PAUL MYRON  
ANTHONY LINEBARGER; 1913-1966)

GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION  
OCTOBER

*Both Isaac and I like cats. The cute little critters have been good to me, what with Catfantastic I and II from this illustrious publisher, Roger Caras' Treasury of Great Cat Stories (which I worked on) from Dutton, and Cat Crimes from Donald I. Fine.*

*Professor Linebarger said that this story was based on "... some of the magical and conspiratorial scenes of The Romance of the Three Kingdoms by Lo Kuan-chung, written during the 14th century." According to Smith's biographer and scholar John J. Pierce, the character of C'Mell came from Cat Melanie, a cat owned by Smith and his wife.*

*"The Ballad of Lost C'Mell" is one of my three favorite stories by this wonderful and strange author.*

*She got the which of the what-she-did,  
Hid the bell with a blot, she did,  
But she fell in love with a hominid.  
Where is the which of the what-she-did?*

from THE BALLAD OF LOST C'MELL

She was a girlygirl and they were true men, the lords of creation, but she pitted her wits against them and

she won. It had never happened before, and it is sure never to happen again, but she did win. She was not even of human extraction. She was cat-derived, though human in outward shape, which explains the C in front of her name. Her father's name was C'mackintosh and her name C'mell. She won her tricks against the lawful and assembled lords of Instrumentality.

It all happened at Earthport, greatest of buildings, smallest of cities, standing twenty-five kilometers high at the western edge of the Smaller Sea of Earth.

Jestocost had an office outside the fourth valve.

1

Jestocost liked the morning sunshine, while most of the other lords of Instrumentality did not, so that he had no trouble in keeping the office and the apartments which he had selected. His main office was ninety meters deep, twenty meters high, twenty meters broad. Behind it was the "fourth valve," almost a thousand hectares in extent. It was shaped helically, like an enormous snail. Jestocost's apartment, big as it was, was merely one of the pigeonholes in the muffler on the rim of Earthport. Earthport stood like an enormous wineglass, reaching from the magma to the high atmosphere.

Earthport had been built during mankind's biggest mechanical splurge. Though men had had nuclear rockets since the beginning of consecutive history, they had used chemical rockets to load the inter-planetary ion-drive and nuclear-drive vehicles or to assemble the photonic sail-ships for interstellar cruises. Impatient with the troubles of taking things bit by bit into the sky, they had worked out a billion-ton rocket, only to find that it ruined whatever countryside it touched in landing. The Daimoni—people of Earth

extraction, who came back from somewhere beyond the stars—had helped men build it of weatherproof, rustproof, timeproof, stressproof material. Then they had gone away and had never come back.

Jestocost often looked around his apartment and wondered what it might have been like when white-hot gas, muted to a whisper, surged out of the valve into his own chamber and the sixty-three other chambers like it. Now he had a back wall of heavy timber, and the valve itself was a great hollow cave where a few wild things lived. Nobody needed that much space any more. The chambers were useful, but the valve did nothing. Planofforming ships whispered in from the stars; they landed at Earthport as a matter of legal convenience, but they made no noise and they certainly had no hot gases.

Jestocost looked at the high clouds far below him and talked to himself.

"Nice day. Good air. No trouble. Better eat."

Jestocost often talked like that to himself. He was an individual, almost an eccentric. One of the top council of mankind, he had problems, but they were not personal problems. He had a Rembrandt hanging above his bed—the only Rembrandt known in the world, just as he was possibly the only person who could appreciate a Rembrandt. He had the tapestries of a forgotten empire hanging from his back wall. Every morning the sun played a grand opera for him, muting and lighting and shifting the colors so that he could almost imagine that the old days of quarrel, murder and high drama had come back to Earth again. He had a copy of Shakespeare, a copy of Colegrove and two pages of the Book of Ecclesiastes in a locked box beside his bed. Only forty-two people in the universe could read Ancient English, and he was one of them. He drank wine, which he had made by his own robots in his own vineyards on the Sunset

coast. He was a man, in short, who had arranged his own life to live comfortably, selfishly and well on the personal side, so that he could give generously and impartially of his talents on the official side.

When he awoke on this particular morning, he had no idea that a beautiful girl was about to fall hopelessly in love with him—that he would find, after a hundred years and more of experience in government, another government on Earth just as strong and almost as ancient as his own—that he would willingly fling himself into conspiracy and danger for a cause which he only half understood. All these things were mercifully hidden from him by time, so that his only question on arising was, should he or should he not have a small cup of white wine with his breakfast. On the one hundred seventy-third day of each year, he always made a point of eating eggs. They were a rare treat, and he did not want to spoil himself by having too many, nor to deprive himself and forget a treat by having none at all. He puttered around the room, muttering, "White wine? White wine?"

C'mell was coming into his life, but he did not know it. She was fated to win; that part, she herself did not know.

Ever since mankind had gone through the Rediscovery of Man, bringing back governments, money, newspapers, national languages, sickness and occasional death, there had been the problem of the underpeople—people who were not human, but merely humanly shaped from the stock of Earth animals. They could speak, sing, read, write, work; love and die; but they were not covered by human law, which simply defined them as "homunculi" and gave them a legal status close to animals or robots. Real people from off-world were always called "hominids."

Most of the underpeople did their jobs and accepted their half-slave status without question. Some became

famous—C'mackintosh had been the first Earth-being to manage a fifty-meter broad-jump under normal gravity. His picture was seen in a thousand worlds. His daughter, C'mell, was a girlygirl, earning her living by welcoming human beings and hominids from the outworlds and making them feel at home when they reached Earth. She had the privilege of working at Earthport, but she had the duty of working very hard for a living which did not pay well. Human beings and hominids had lived so long in an affluent society that they did not know what it meant to be poor. But the lords of the Instrumentality had decreed that underpeople—derived from animal stock—should live under the economics of the Ancient World; they had to have their own kind of money to pay for their rooms, their food, their possessions and the education of their children. If they became bankrupt, they went to the Poorhouse, where they were killed painlessly by means of gas.

It was evident that humanity, having settled all of its own basic problems, was not quite ready to let Earth animals, no matter how much they might be changed, assume a full equality with man.

The Lord Jestocost, seventh of that name, opposed the policy. He was a man who had little love, no fear, freedom from ambition and a dedication to his job: but there are passions of government as deep and challenging as the emotions of love. Two hundred years of thinking himself right and of being outvoted had instilled in Jestocost a furious desire to get things done his own way.

Jestocost was one of the few true men who believed in the rights of the underpeople. He did not think that mankind would ever get around to correcting ancient wrongs unless the underpeople themselves had some of the tools of power—weapons, conspiracy, wealth and (above all) organization with which to challenge man.

He was not afraid of revolt, but he thirsted for justice with an obsessive yearning which overrode all other considerations.

When the lords of the Instrumentality heard that there was the rumor of a conspiracy among the underpeople, they left it to the robot police to ferret it out.

Jestocost did not.

He set up his own police, using underpeople themselves for the purpose, hoping to recruit enemies who would realize that he was a friendly enemy and who would in course of time bring him into touch with the leaders of the underpeople.

If those leaders existed, they were clever. What sign did a girlygirl like C'mell ever give that she was the spearhead of a crisscross of agents who had penetrated Earthport itself? They must, if they existed, be very, very careful. The telepathic monitors, both robotic and human, kept every thought-band under surveillance by random sampling. Even the computers showed nothing more significant than improbable amounts of happiness in minds which had no objective reason for being happy.

The death of her father, the most famous cat-athlete which the underpeople had ever produced, gave Jestocost his first definite clue.

He went to the funeral himself, where the body was packed in an ice-rocket to be shot into space. The mourners were thoroughly mixed with the curiosity-seekers. Sport is international, inter-race, inter-world, inter-species. Hominids were there: true men, one hundred percent human, they looked weird and horrible because they or their ancestors had undergone bodily modifications to meet the life conditions of a thousand worlds.

Underpeople, the animal-derived "homunculi," were there, most of them in their work clothes, and they looked more human than did the human beings

from the outer worlds. None were allowed to grow up if they were less than half the size of man, or more than six times the size of man. They all had to have human features and acceptable human voices. The punishment for failure in their elementary schools was death. Jestocost looked over the crowd and wondered to himself, "We have set up the standards of the toughest kind of survival for these people and we give them the most terrible incentive, life itself, as the condition of absolute progress. What fools we are to think that they will not overtake us!" The true people in the group did not seem to think as he did. They tapped the underpeople peremptorily with their canes, even though this was an underperson's funeral, and the bear-men, bull-men, cat-men and others yielded immediately and with a babble of apology.

C'mell was close to her father's icy coffin.

Jestocost not only watched her; she was pretty to watch. He committed an act which was an indecency in an ordinary citizen but lawful for a lord of the Instrumentality: he peeped her mind.

And then he found something which he did not expect.

As the coffin left, she cried, "Ee-telly-kelly, help me! help me!"

She had thought phonetically, not in script, and he had only the raw sound on which to base a search.

Jestocost had not become a lord of the Instrumentality without applying daring. His mind was quick, too quick to be deeply intelligent. He thought by gestalt, not by logic. He determined to force his friendship on the girl.

He decided to await a propitious occasion, and then changed his mind about the time.

As she went home from the funeral, he intruded upon the circle of her grim-faced friends, underpeople

who were trying to shield her from the condolences of ill-mannered but well-meaning sports enthusiasts.

She recognized him, and showed him the proper respect.

"My Lord, I did not expect you here. You knew my father?"

He nodded gravely and addressed sonorous words of consolation and sorrow, words which brought a murmur of approval from humans and underpeople alike.

But with his left hand hanging slack at his side, he made the perpetual sign of *alarm! alarm!* used within the Earthport staff—a repeated tapping of the thumb against the third finger—when they had to set one another on guard without alerting the offworld transients.

She was so upset that she almost spoiled it all. While he was still doing his pious doubletalk, she cried in a loud clear voice:

"You mean *me*?"

And he went on with his condolences: ". . . and I do mean *you*, C'mell, to be the worthiest carrier of your father's name. *You* are the one to whom we turn in this time of common sorrow. *Who could I mean but you* if I say that C'mackintosh never did things by halves, and died young as a result of his own zealous conscience? Goodbye, C'mell, I go back to my office."

She arrived forty minutes after he did.

## 2

He faced her straightaway, studying her face.

"This is an important day in your life."

"Yes, my Lord, a sad one."

"I do not," he said, "mean your father's death and

burial. I speak of the future to which we all must turn. Right now, it's you and me."

Her eyes widened. She had not thought that he was that kind of man at all. He was an official who moved freely around Earthport, often greeting important off-world visitors and keeping an eye on the bureau of ceremonies. She was a part of the reception team, when a girlygirl was needed to calm down a frustrated arrival or to postpone a quarrel. Like the geisha of ancient Japan, she had an honorable profession; she was not a bad girl but a professionally flirtatious hostess. She stared at the Lord Jestocost. He did not *look* as though he meant anything improperly personal. But, thought she, you can never tell about men.

"You know men," he said, passing the initiative to her.

"I guess so," she said. Her face looked odd. She started to give him smile No. 3 (extremely adhesive) which she had learned in the girlygirl school. Realizing it was wrong, she tried to give him an ordinary smile. She felt she had made a face at him.

"Look at me," he said, "and see if you can trust me. I am going to take both our lives in my hands."

She looked at him. What imaginable subject could involve him, a lord of the Instrumentality, with herself, an undergirl? They never had anything in common. They never would.

But she stared at him.

"I want to help the underpeople."

He made her blink. That was a crude approach, usually followed by a very raw kind of pass indeed. But his face was illuminated by seriousness. She waited.

"Your people do not have enough political power even to talk to us. I will not commit treason to the true human race, but I am willing to give your side an advantage. If you bargain better with us, it will make all forms of life safer in the long run."

C'mell stared at the floor, her red hair soft as the fur of a Persian cat. It made her head seem bathed in flames. Her eyes looked human, except that they had the capacity of reflecting when light struck them; the irises were the rich green of the ancient cat. When she looked right at him, looking up from the floor, her glance had the impact of a blow. "What do you want from me?"

He stared right back. "Watch me. Look at my face. Are you sure, *sure* that I want nothing from you personally?"

She looked bewildered. "What else is there to want from me except personal things? I am a girlygirl. I'm not a person of any importance at all, and I do not have much of an education. You know more, sir, than I will ever know."

"Possibly," he said, watching her.

She stopped feeling like a girlygirl and felt like a citizen. It made her uncomfortable.

"Who," he said, in a voice of great solemnity, "is your own leader?"

"Commissioner Teadrinker, sir. He's in charge of all outworld visitors." She watched Jestocost carefully; he still did not look as if he were playing tricks.

He looked a little cross. "I don't mean him. He's part of my own staff. Who's your leader among the underpeople?"

"My father was, but he died."

Jestocost said, "Forgive me. Please have a seat. But I don't mean that."

She was so tired that she sat down into the chair with an innocent voluptuousness which would have disorganized any ordinary man's day. She wore girly-girl clothes, which were close enough to the everyday fashion to seem agreeably modish when she stood up. In line with her profession, her clothes were designed to be unexpectedly and provocatively revealing when

she sat down—not revealing enough to shock the man with their brazenness, but so slit, tripped and cut that he got far more visual stimulation than he expected.

"I must ask you to pull your clothing together a little," said Jestocost in a clinical turn of voice. "I am a man, even if I am an official, and this interview is more important to you and to me than any distraction would be."

She was a little frightened by his tone. She had meant no challenge. With the funeral that day, she meant nothing at all; these clothes were the only kind she had.

He read all this in her face.

Relentlessly, he pursued the subject.

"Young lady, I asked about your leader. You name your boss and you name your father. I want your leader."

"I don't understand," she said, on the edge of a sob, "I don't understand."

Then, he thought to himself, I've got to take a gamble. He thrust the mental dagger home, almost drove his words like steel straight into her face. "Who . . ." he said slowly and icily, "is . . . Ee . . . telly . . . kelly?"

The girl's face had been cream-colored, pale with sorrow. Now she went white. She twisted away from him. Her eyes glowed like twin fires.

Her eyes . . . like twin fires.

(No undergirl, thought Jestocost as he reeled, could hypnotize me.)

Her eyes . . . were like cold fires.

The room faded around him. The girl disappeared. Her eyes became a single white, cold fire.

Within this fire stood the figure of a man. His arms were wings, but he had human hands growing at the elbows of his wings. His face was clear, white, cold as the marble of an ancient statue; his eyes were opaque

white. "I am the E'telekeli. You will believe in me. You may speak to my daughter C'mell."

The image faded.

Jestocost saw the girl staring as she sat awkwardly on the chair, looking blindly through him. He was on the edge of making a joke about her hypnotic capacity when he saw that she was still deeply hypnotized, even after he had been released. She had stiffened and again her clothing had fallen into its planned disarray. The effect was not stimulating; it was pathetic beyond words, as though an accident had happened to a pretty child. He spoke to her.

He spoke to her, not really expecting an answer.

"Who are you?" he said to her, testing her hypnosis.

"I am he whose name is never said aloud," said the girl in a sharp whisper, "I am he whose secret you have penetrated. I have printed my image and my name in your mind."

Jestocost did not quarrel with ghosts like this. He snapped out a decision. "If I open my mind, will you search it while I watch you? Are you good enough to do that?"

"I am very good," hissed the voice in the girl's mouth.

C'mell arose and put her two hands on his shoulders. She looked into his eyes. He looked back. A strong telepath himself, Jestocost was not prepared for the enormous thought-voltage which poured out of her.

Look in my mind, he commanded, for the subject of *underpeople* only.

I see it, thought the mind behind C'mell.

Do you see what I mean to do for the underpeople?

Jestocost heard the girl breathing hard as her mind served as a relay to his. He tried to remain calm so that he could see which part of his mind was being

searched. Very good so far, he thought to himself. An intelligence like that on Earth itself, he thought—and we of the lords not knowing it!

The girl hacked out a dry little laugh.

Jestocost thought at the mind, Sorry. Go ahead.

This plan of yours—thought the strange mind—may I see more of it?

That's all there is.

Oh, said the strange mind, you want me to think for you. Can you give me the keys in the Bell and Bank which pertain to destroying underpeople?

You can have the information keys if I can ever get them, thought Jestocost, but not the control keys and not the master switch of the Bell.

Fair enough, thought the other mind, and what do I pay for them?

You support me in my policies before the Instrumentality. You keep the underpeople reasonable, if you can, when the time comes to negotiate. You maintain honor and good faith in all subsequent agreements. But how can I get the keys? It would take me a year to figure them out myself.

Let the girl look once, thought the strange mind, and I will be behind her. Fair?

Fair, thought Jestocost.

Break? thought the mind.

How do we re-connect? thought Jestocost back.

As before. Through the girl. Never say my name. Don't think it if you can help it. Break?

Break! thought Jestocost.

The girl, who had been holding his shoulders, drew his face down and kissed him firmly and warmly. He had never touched an underperson before, and it never had occurred to him that he might kiss one. It was pleasant, but he took her arms away from his neck, half-turned her around, and let her lean against him.

"Daddy!" she sighed happily.

Suddenly she stiffened, looked at his face, and sprang for the door. "Jestocost!" she cried. "Lord Jestocost! What am I doing here?"

"Your duty is done, my girl. You may go."

She staggered back into the room. "I'm going to be sick," she said. She vomited on his floor.

He pushed a button for a cleaning robot and slapped his desk-top for coffee.

She relaxed and talked about his hopes for the underpeople. She stayed an hour. By the time she left they had a plan. Neither of them had mentioned E'telekeli, neither had put purposes in the open. If the monitors had been listening, they would have found no single sentence or paragraph which was suspicious.

When she had gone, Jestocost looked out of his window. He saw the clouds far below and he knew the world below him was in twilight. He had planned to help the underpeople, and he had met powers of which organized mankind had no conception or perception. He was righter than he had thought. He had to go on through.

But as partner—C'mell herself!

Was there ever an odder diplomat in the history of worlds?

### 3

In less than a week they had decided what to do. It was the Council of the lords of the Instrumentality at which they would work—the brain center itself. The risk was high, but the entire job could be done in a few minutes if it were done at the Bell itself.

This is the sort of thing which interested Jestocost.

He did not know that C'mell watched him with two different facets of her mind. One side of her was

alertly and wholeheartedly his fellow-conspirator, utterly in sympathy with the revolutionary aims to which they were both committed. The other side of her—was feminine.

She had a womanliness which was truer than that of any hominid woman. She knew the value of her trained smile, her splendidly kept red hair with its unimaginably soft texture, her lithe young figure with firm breasts and persuasive hips. She knew down to the last millimeter the effect which her legs had on hominid men. True humans kept few secrets from her. The men betrayed themselves by their unfulfillable desires, the women by their irrepressible jealousies. But she knew people best of all by not being one herself. She had to learn by imitation, and imitation is conscious. A thousand little things which ordinary women took for granted, or thought about just once in a whole lifetime, were subjects of acute and intelligent study to her. She was a girl by profession; she was a human by assimilation: she was an inquisitive cat in her genetic nature. Now she was falling in love with Jestocost, and she knew it.

Even she did not realize that the romance would sometime leak out into rumor, be magnified into legend, distilled into romance. She had no idea of the ballad about herself that would open with the lines which became famous much later:

*She got the which of the what-she-did,  
Hid the bell with a blot, she did,  
But she fell in love with a hominid.  
Where is the which of the what-she-did?*

All this lay in the future, and she did not know it. She knew her own past.

She remembered the off-Earth prince who had

rested his head in her lap and had said, sipping his glass of mott by way of farewell:

"Funny, C'mell, you're not even a person and you're the most intelligent human being I've met in this place. Do you know it made my planet poor to send me here? And what did I get out of them? Nothing, nothing, and a thousand times nothing. But you, now. If you'd been running the government of Earth, I'd have gotten what my people need, and this world would be richer too. Manhome, they call it. Manhome, my eye! The only smart person on it is a female cat."

He ran his fingers around her ankle. She did not stir. That was part of hospitality, and she had her own ways of making sure that hospitality did not go too far. Earth police were watching her; to them, she was a convenience maintained for outworld people, something like a soft chair in the Earthport lobbies or a drinking fountain with acid-tasting water for strangers who could not tolerate the insipid water of Earth. She was not expected to have feelings or to get involved. If she had ever caused an incident, they would have punished her fiercely, as they often punished animals or underpeople, or else (after a short formal hearing with no appeal) they would have destroyed her, as the law allowed and custom encouraged.

She had kissed a thousand men, maybe fifteen hundred. She had made them feel welcome and she had gotten their complaints or their secrets out of them as they left. It was a living, emotionally tiring but intellectually very stimulating. Sometimes it made her laugh to look at human women with their pointed-up noses and their proud airs, and to realize that she knew more about the men who belonged to the human women than the human women themselves ever did.

Once a policewoman had had to read over the record of two pioneers from New Mars. C'mell had

been given the job of keeping in very close touch with them. When the policewoman got through reading the report she looked at C'mell and her face was distorted with jealousy and prudish rage.

"Cat, you call yourself. Cat! You're a pig, you're a dog, you're an animal. You may be working for Earth but don't ever get the idea that you're as good as a person. I think it's a crime that the Instrumentality lets monsters like you greet real human beings from outside! I can't stop it. But may the Bell help you, girl, if you ever touch a real Earth man! If you ever get near one! If you ever try tricks here! Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Ma'am," C'mell had said. To herself she thought, "That poor thing doesn't know how to select her own clothes or how to do her own hair. No wonder she resents somebody who manages to be pretty."

Perhaps the policewoman thought that raw hatred would be shocking to C'mell. It wasn't. Underpeople were used to hatred, and it was not any worse raw than it was when cooked with politeness and served like poison. They had to live with it.

But now, it was all changed.

She had fallen in love with Jestocost.

Did he love her?

Impossible. No, not impossible. Unlawful, unlikely, indecent—yes, all these, but not impossible. Surely he felt something of her love.

If he did, he gave no sign of it.

People and underpeople had fallen in love many times before. The underpeople were always destroyed and the real people brainwashed. There were laws against that kind of thing. The scientists among people had created the underpeople, had given them capacities which real people did not have (the fifty-meter jump, the telepath two miles underground, the turtle-man waiting a thousand years next to an emergency

door, the cow-man guarding a gate without reward), and the scientists had also given many of the underpeople the human shape. It was handier that way. The human eye, the five-fingered hand, the human size—these were convenient for engineering reasons. By making underpeople the same size and shape as people, more or less, the scientists eliminated the need for two or three or a dozen different sets of furniture. The human form was good enough for all of them.

But they had forgotten the human heart.

And now she, C'mell had fallen in love with a man, a true man old enough to have been her own father's grandfather.

But she didn't feel daughterly about him at all. She remembered that with her own father there was an easy comradeship, an innocent and forthcoming affection, which masked the fact that he was considerably more catlike than she was. Between them there was an aching void of forever-unspoken words—things that couldn't quite be said by either of them, perhaps things that couldn't be said at all. They were so close to each other that they could get no closer. This created enormous distance, which was heart-breaking but unutterable. Her father had died, and now this true man was here, with all the kindness—

"That's it," she whispered to herself, "with all the kindness that none of these passing men have ever really shown. With all the depth which my poor underpeople can never get. Not that it's not in them. But they're born like dirt, treated like dirt, put away like dirt when they die. How can any of my own men develop real kindness? There's a special sort of majesty to kindness. It's the best part there is to being people. And he has whole oceans of it in him. And it's strange, strange, strange that he's never given his real love to any human woman."

She stopped, cold.

Then she consoled herself and whispered on, "Or if he did, it's so long ago that it doesn't matter now. He's got *me*. Does he know it?"

## 4

The Lord Jestocost did know, and yet he didn't. He was used to getting loyalty from people, because he offered loyalty and honor in his daily work. He was even familiar with loyalty becoming obsessive and seeking physical form, particularly from women, children and underpeople. He had always coped with it before. He was gambling on the fact that C'mell was a wonderfully intelligent person, and that as a girlygirl, working on the hospitality staff of the Earthport police, she must have learned to control her personal feelings.

"We're born in the wrong age," he thought, "when I meet the most intelligent and beautiful female I've ever met, and then have to put business first. But this stuff about people and underpeople is sticky. Sticky. We've got to keep personalities out of it."

So he thought. Perhaps he was right.

If the nameless one, whom he did not dare to remember, commanded an attack on the Bell itself, that was worth their lives. Their emotions could not come into it. The Bell mattered; justice mattered; the perpetual return of mankind to progress mattered. He did not matter, because he had already done most of his work. C'mell did not matter, because their failure would leave her with mere underpeople forever. The Bell did count.

The price of what he proposed to do was high, but the entire job could be done in a few minutes if it were done at the Bell itself.

The Bell, of course, was not a Bell. It was a three-dimensional situation table, three times the

height of a man. It was set one story below the meeting room, and shaped roughly like an ancient bell. The meeting table of the lords of the Instrumentality had a circle cut out of it, so that the lords could look down into the Bell at whatever situation one of them called up either manually or telepathically. The Bank below it, hidden by the floor, was the key memory-bank of the entire system. Duplicates existed at thirty-odd other places on Earth. Two duplicates lay hidden in interstellar space, one of them beside the ninety-million-mile gold-colored ship left over from the war against Raumsog and the other masked as an asteroid.

Most of the lords were off-world on the business of the Instrumentality.

Only three besides Jestocost were present—the Lady Johanna Gnade, the Lord Issan Olascoaga and the Lord William Not-from-here. (The Not-from-heres were a great Norstrilian family which had migrated back to Earth many generations before.)

The E'telekeli told Jestocost the rudiments of a plan.

He was to bring C'mell into the chambers on a summons.

The summons was to be serious.

They should avoid her summary death by automatic justice, if the relays began to trip.

C'mell would go into partial trance in the chamber. He was then to call the items in the Bell which E'telekeli wanted traced. A single call would be enough. E'telekeli would take the responsibility for tracing them. The other lords would be distracted by him, E'telekeli.

It was simple in appearance.

The complication came in action.

The plan seemed flimsy, but there was nothing which Jestocost could do at this time. He began to curse himself for letting his passion for policy involve

him in the intrigue. It was too late to back out with honor; besides, he had given his word; besides, he liked C'mell—as a being, not a girlygirl—and he would hate to see her marked with disappointment for life. He knew how the underpeople cherished their identities and their status.

With heavy heart but quick mind he went to the council chamber. A dog-girl, one of the routine messengers whom he had seen many months outside the door, gave him the minutes.

He wondered how C'mell or E'telekeli would reach him, once he was inside the chamber with its tight net of telepathic intercepts.

He sat wearily at the table—

And almost jumped out of his chair.

The conspirators had forged the minutes themselves, and the top item was: "C'mell daughter to C'mackintosh, cat stock (pure), lot 1138, confession of. Subject: conspiracy to export homuncular material. Reference: planet De Prinsensmacht."

The Lady Johanna Gnade had already pushed the buttons for the planet concerned. The people there, Earth by origin, were enormously strong but they had gone to great pains to maintain the original Earth appearance. One of their first-men was at the moment on Earth. He bore the title of the Twilight Prince (Prins van de Schemering) and he was on a mixed diplomatic and trading mission.

Since Jestocost was a little late, C'mell was being brought into the room as he glanced over the minutes.

The Lord Not-from-here asked Jestocost if he would preside.

"I beg you, Sir and Scholar," he said, "to join me in asking the Lord Issan to preside this time."

The presidency was a formality. Jestocost could watch the Bell and Bank better if he did not have to chair the meeting too.

C'mell wore the clothing of a prisoner. On her it looked good. He had never seen her wearing anything but girlygirl clothes before. The pale-blue prison tunic made her look very young, very human, very tender and very frightened. The cat family showed only in the fiery cascade of her hair and the lithe power of her body as she sat, demure and erect.

Lord Issan asked her: "You have confessed. Confess again."

"This man," and she pointed at a picture of the Twilight Prince, "wanted to go to the place where they torment human children for a show."

"What!" cried three of the lords together.

"What place?" said the Lady Johanna, who was bitterly in favor of kindness.

"It's run by a man who looks like this gentleman here," said C'mell, pointing at Jestocost. Quickly, so that nobody could stop her, but modestly, so that none of them thought to doubt her, she circled the room and touched Jestocost's shoulder. He felt a thrill of contact-telepathy and heard bird-cackle in her brain. Then he knew that the E'telekeli was in touch with her.

"The man who has the place," said C'mell, "is five pounds lighter than this gentleman, two inches shorter, and he has red hair. His place is at the Cold Sunset corner of Earthport, down the boulevard and under the boulevard. Underpeople, some of them with bad reputations, live in that neighborhood."

The Bell went milky, flashing through hundreds of combinations of bad underpeople in that part of the city. Jestocost felt himself staring at the casual milki-ness with unwanted concentration.

The Bell cleared.

It showed the vague image of a room in which children were playing Hallowe'en tricks.

The Lady Johanna laughed, "Those aren't people. They're robots. It's just a dull old play."

"Then," added C'mell, "he wanted a dollar and a shilling to take home. Real ones. There was a robot who had found some."

"What are those?" said Lord Issan.

"Ancient money—the real money of old America and old Australia," cried Lord William. "I have copies, but there are no originals outside the state museum." He was an ardent, passionate collector of coins.

"The robot found them in an old hiding place right under Earthport."

Lord William almost shouted at the Bell. "Run through every hiding place and get me that money."

The Bell clouded. In finding the bad neighborhoods it had flashed every police point in the northwest sector of the tower. Now it scanned all the police points under the tower, and ran dizzily through thousands of combinations before it settled on an old toolroom. A robot was polishing circular pieces of metal.

When Lord William saw the polishing, he was furious. "Get that here," he shouted. "I want to buy those myself!"

"All right," said Lord Issan. "It's a little irregular, but all right."

The machine showed the key search devices and brought the robot to the escalator.

The Lord Issan said, "This isn't much of a case."

C'mell sniveled. She was a good actress. "Then he wanted me to get a homunculus egg. One of the E-type, derived from birds, for him to take home."

Issan put on the search device.

"Maybe," said C'mell, "somebody has already put it in the disposal series."

The Bell and the Bank ran through all the disposal devices at high speed. Jestocost felt his nerves go on

edge. No human being could have memorized these thousands of patterns as they flashed across the Bell too fast for human eyes, but the brain reading the Bell through his eyes was not human. It might even be locked into a computer of its own. It was, thought Jestocost, an indignity for a lord of the Instrumentality to be used as a human spy-glass.

The machine blotted up.

"You're a fraud," cried the Lord Issan. "There's no evidence."

"Maybe the offworlder tried," said the Lady Johanna.

"Shadow him," said Lord William. "If he would steal ancient coins he would steal anything."

The Lady Johanna turned to C'mell. "You're a silly thing. You have wasted our time and you have kept us from serious inter-world business."

"It *is* inter-world business," wept C'mell. She let her hand slip from Jestocost's shoulder, where it had rested all the time. The body-to-body relay broke and the telepathic link broke with it.

"We should judge that," said Lord Issan.

"You might have been punished," said Lady Johanna.

The Lord Jestocost had said nothing, but there was a glow of happiness in him. If the E'telekeli was half as good as he seemed, the underpeople had a list of checkpoints and escape routes which would make it easier to hide from the capricious sentence of painless death which human authorities meted out.

## 5

There was singing in the corridors that night.

Underpeople burst into happiness for no visible reason.

C'mell danced a wild cat dance for the next customer who came in from outworld stations, that very

evening. When she got home to bed, she knelt before the picture of her father C'mackintosh and thanked the E'telekeli for what Jestocost had done.

But the story became known a few generations later, when the Lord Jestocost had won acclaim for being the champion of the underpeople and when the authorities, still unaware of E'telekeli, accepted the elected representatives of the underpeople as negotiators for better terms of life; and C'mell had died long since.

She had first had a long, good life.

She became a female chef when she was too old to be a girlygirl. Her food was famous. Jestocost once visited her. At the end of the meal he had asked, "There's a silly rhyme among the underpeople. No human beings know it except me."

"I don't care about rhymes," she said.

"This is called 'The what-she-did.' "

C'mell blushed all the way down to the neckline of her capacious blouse. She had filled out a lot in middle age. Running the restaurant had helped.

"Oh, that rhyme!" she said. "It's silly."

"It says you were in love with a hominid."

"No," she said. "I wasn't." Her green eyes, as beautiful as ever, stared deeply into his. Jestocost felt uncomfortable. This was getting personal. He liked political relationships; personal things made him uncomfortable.

The light in the room shifted and her cat eyes blazed at him, she looked like the magical fire-haired girl he had known.

"I wasn't in love. You couldn't call it that . . ."

Her heart cried out, *It was you, it was you, it was you.*

"But the rhyme," insisted Jestocost, "says it was a hominid. It wasn't that Prins van de Schemering?"

"Who was he?" C'mell asked the question quietly,

but her emotions cried out, *Darling, will you never, never know?*

"The strong man."

"Oh, him. I've forgotten him."

Jestocost rose from the table. "You've had a good life, C'mell. You've been a citizen, a committee-woman, a leader. And do you even know how many children you have had?"

"Seventy-three," she snapped at him. "Just because they're multiple doesn't mean we don't know them."

His playfulness left him. His face was grave, his voice kindly. "I meant no harm, C'mell."

He never knew that when he left she went back to the kitchen and cried for a while. It was Jestocost whom she had vainly loved ever since they had been comrades, many long years ago.

Even after she died, at the full age of five-score and three, he kept seeing her about the corridors and shafts of Earthport. Many of her greatgranddaughters looked just like her and several of them practiced the girlygirl business with huge success.

They were not half-slaves. They were citizens (reserved grade) and they had photopasses which protected their property, their identity and their rights. Jestocost was the godfather to them all; he was often embarrassed when the most voluptuous creatures in the universe threw playful kisses at him. All he asked was fulfillment of his political passions, not his personal ones. He had always been in love, madly in love—

With justice itself.

At last, his own time came, and he knew that he was dying, and he was not sorry. He had had a wife, hundreds of years ago, and had loved her well; their children had passed into the generations of man.

In the ending, he wanted to know something, and he called to a nameless one (or to his successor) far

beneath the ground. He called with his mind till it was a scream.

*I have helped your people.*

"Yes," came back the faintest of faraway whispers, inside his head.

*I am dying. I must know. Did she love me?*

"She went on without you, so much did she love you. She let you go, for your sake, not for hers. She really loved you. More than death. More than life. More than time. You will never be apart."

*Never apart?*

"Not, not in the memory of man," said the voice, and was then still.

Jestocost lay back on his pillow and waited for the day to end.



# GADGET VS. TREND

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BY CHRISTOPHER ANVIL (HARRY C. CROSBY, 19 - )

ANALOG  
OCTOBER

*"Christopher Anvil's novels—which include The Day the Machines Stopped (1964); Strangers in Paradise (1970); Pandora's Planet (1972); Warlord's World, and The Steel, The Mist, and The Blazing Sun (both 1975)—are competent enough and good reads, but it is at the shorter lengths that he did his best work, which is yet to be collected. At his best, he was a master of the social sf story and of the "gimmick" story (a term I use with respect) where he had a great time turning concepts on their head, side, and bottom-up.*

*"Gadget vs. Trend" uses very little dialogue, starts off with a Professor of Sociology, and has a great deal to say about social, economic, and political forecasting in this country, and the people who make these predictions.*

Boston, Sept. 2, 1976. Dr. R. Milton Schummer, Professor of Sociology at Wellsford College, spoke out against "creeping conformism" to an audience of twelve hundred in Swarton Hall last night.

Professor Schummer charged that America, once the land of the free, is now "the abode of the stereo-

typed mass-man, shaped from infancy by the moron-molding influences of television, mass-circulation newspapers and magazines, and the pervasive influence of advertising manifest in all these media. The result is the mass-production American with interchangeable parts and built-in taped programme."

What this country needs, said Dr. Schummer, is "freedom to differ, freedom to be eccentric." But, he concluded, "the momentum is too great. The trend, like the tide, cannot be reversed by human efforts. In two hundred years, this nation has gone from individualism to conformism, from independence to interdependence, from federalism to fusionism, and the end is not yet. One shrinks at the thought of what the next one hundred years may bring."

Rutland, Vt., March 16, 1977. Dr. J. Paul Hughes, grandson of the late inventor, Everett Hughes, revealed today a device which his grandfather kept under wraps because of its "supposedly dangerous side-effects." Dubbed by Dr. Hughes a "privacy shield," the device works by the "exclusion of quasi-electrons." In the words of Dr. Hughes:

"My grandfather was an eccentric experimenter. Surprisingly often, though, his wild stabs would strike some form of pay dirt, in a commercial sense. In this present instance, we have a device unexplainable by any sound scientific theory, but which may be commercially quite useful. When properly set up, and connected to a suitable electrical outlet, the device effectively soundproofs material surfaces, such as walls, doors, floors, and the like, and thus may be quite helpful in present-day crowded living conditions."

Dr. Hughes explained that the device was supposed to operate by "the exclusion of 'quasi-electrons', which my grandfather thought governed the transmis-

sion of sound through solid bodies, and performed various other esoteric functions. But we needn't take this too seriously."

New York, May 12, 1977. Formation of Hughes QuietWall Corporation was announced here today.

President of the new firm is J. Paul Hughes, grandson of the late inventor, Everett Hughes.

New York, Sept. 18, 1977. One of the hottest stocks on the market today is Hughes QuietWall. With demand booming, and the original president of the firm kicked upstairs to make room for the crack management expert, Myron L. Sams, the corporation has tapped a gold mine.

Said a company spokesman: "The biggest need in this country today is privacy. We live practically in each other's pockets, and if we can't do anything else, at least QuietWall can soundproof the pockets."

The QuietWall units, which retail for \$289.95 for the basic room unit, are said to offer dealer, distributor, and manufacturer a generous profit. And no one can say that \$289.95 is not a reasonable price to pay to keep out the noise of other people's TV, record players, quarrels and squalling babies.

Detroit, December 23, 1977. Santa left an early present for the auto industry here today.

A test driver trying out a car equipped with a Hughes QuietWall unit went into a skid on the icy test track, rolled over three times, and got out shaken but unhurt. The car itself, a light supercompact, was found to be almost totally undamaged.

Tests with sledgehammers revealed the astonishing fact that with the unit turned on, the car would not dent, and the glass could not be broken. The charge filler cap could not be unscrewed. The hood could not

be raised. And neither windows nor doors could be opened till the unit was snapped off. With the unit off, the car was perfectly ordinary.

This is the first known trial of QuietWall unit in a motor vehicle.

Standard house and apartment installations use a specially designed basic unit to soundproof floor and walls, and small additional units to soundproof doors and windows. This installation tested today apparently lacked such refinements.

December 26, 1977. J. Paul Hughes, chairman of the board of directors of the QuietWall Corp., stated to reporters today that his firm has no intention to market the Hughes QuietWall unit for use in motor cars.

Hughes denied the Detroit report of a QuietWall-equipped test car that rolled without damage, calling it "impossible."

Hartford, January 8, 1978. Regardless of denials from the QuietWall Corporation, nationwide experiments are being conducted into the use of the corporation's sound-deadening units as a safety device in cars. Numerous letters, telegrams, and phone calls are being received at the head offices of some of the nation's leading insurance companies here.

Hartford, January 9, 1978. Tests carried out by executives of the New Standard Insurance Group indicate that the original Detroit reports were perfectly accurate.

Cars equipped with the QuietWall units cannot be dented, shattered, scratched, or injured in any way by ordinary tools.

Austin J. Ramm, Executive Secretary of New Standard Group, stated to reporters:

"It's the damndest thing I ever saw.

"We've had so many communications, from people all over the country who claim to have connected QuietWall units to their cars, that we decided to try it out ourselves.

"We tried rocks, hammers, and so forth, on the test vehicle. When these didn't have any effect, I tried a quarter-inch electric drill and Steve Willoughby—he's our president—took a crack at the centre of the windshield with a railroad pickaxe. The pickaxe bounced. My drill just slid around over the surface and wouldn't bite in.

"We have quite a few other things we want to try.

"But we've seen enough to know there definitely is truth in these reports."

New York, January 10, 1978. Myron L. Sams, president of the Hughes QuietWall Corporation, announced today that a special automotive attachment is being put on sale throughout the country. Mr. Sams warns that improper installation may, among other things, seize up all or part of the operating machinery of the car. He urges that company representatives be allowed to carry out the installation.

Dallas, January 12, 1978. In a chase lasting an hour, a gang of bank robbers got away this afternoon with \$869,000 in cash and negotiable securities.

Despite a hail of bullets, the escape car was not damaged. An attempt to halt it at a roadblock failed, as the car crashed through without injury.

There is speculation here that the car was equipped with one of the Hughes QuietWall units that went on sale a few days ago.

Las Vegas, January 19, 1978. A gang of eight to ten criminals held up the Silver Dollar Club tonight, escaping with over a quarter of a million dollars.

It was one of the most bizarre robberies in the city's history.

The criminals entered the club in golf carts fitted with light aluminum- and transparent-plastic covers, and opened a gun battle with club employees. A short fight disclosed that it was impossible to even dent the light shielding on the golf carts. Using the club's patrons and employees as hostages, the gunmen received the cash they demanded, rolled across the sidewalk and up a ramp into the rear of a waiting truck, which drove out of town, smashing through a hastily erected roadblock.

As police gave chase, the truck proved impossible to damage. In a violent exchange of gunfire, no one was injured, as the police cars were equipped with newly installed QuietWall units, and it was evident that the truck was also so equipped.

Well outside of town, the truck reached a second roadblock. The robbers attempted to smash through the seemingly flimsy barrier, but were brought to a sudden stop when the roadblock, fitted with a QuietWall unit, failed to give way.

The truck, and the golf carts within, were found to be undamaged. The bandits are now undergoing treatment for concussion and severe whiplash injuries.

The \$250,000.00 has been returned to the Silver Dollar Club, and Las Vegas is comparatively quiet once more.

New York, January 23, 1978. In a hastily called news conference, J. Paul Hughes, chairman of the board of Hughes QuietWall Corporation, announced that he is calling upon the Federal Government to step in and suspend the activities of the corporation.

Pointing out that he has tried without success to suspend the company's operations on his own authority, Dr. Hughes stated that as a scientist he must warn

the public against a dangerous technological development, "the menacing potentialities of which I have only recently come to appreciate."

No response has as yet been received from Washington.

New York, January 24, 1978. President Myron L. Sams today acknowledged the truth of reports that a bitter internal struggle is being waged for control of the Hughes QuietWall Corporation.

Spring Corners, Iowa, January 26, 1978. Oscar B. Nelde, a farmer on the outskirts of town, has erected a barricade that has backed up traffic on the new Cross-State Highway for twenty miles in both directions.

Mr. Nelde recently lost a suit for additional damages when the highway cut his farm into two unequal parts, the smaller one containing his house and farm buildings, the larger part containing his fields.

The barricade is made of oil drums, saw horses, and barbed wire. The oil drums and saw horses cannot be moved, and act as if welded to the frozen earth. The barbed wire is weirdly stiff and immovable. The barricade is set up in a double row of these immovable obstacles, obstacles, spaced to form a twenty-foot-wide lane connecting the two separated parts of Mr. Nelde's farm.

Mr. Nelde's manure spreader was seen crossing the road early today.

Heavy road machinery has failed to budge the obstacles. The experts are stumped. However, the local QuietWall dealer recalls selling Mr. Nelde a quantity of small units recently and adds, "but no more than a lot of other farmers have been buying lately".

It may be worth mentioning that Mr. Nelde's claim is one of many that have been advanced locally.

New York, January 27, 1978. The Hughes QuietWall Corporation was today reorganised as QuietWall, Incorporated, with Myron L. Sams holding the positions of president and chairman of the board of directors. J. Paul Hughes, grandson of Everett Hughes, continues as a director.

Spring Corners, Iowa, January 28, 1978. Traffic is flowing once again on the Cross-State Highway.

This morning a U.S. Army truck-mounted earth auger moved up the highway and drilled a number of holes six feet in diameter, enabling large chunks of earth to be carefully loosened and both sections of the barricade to be lifted out as units. The wire, oil drums, saw horses, and big chunks of earth, which remained rigid when lifted out, are being removed to the U.S. Army Research and Development Laboratories for study. No QuietWall units have been found, and it is assumed that they are imbedded, along with their power source, inside the masses of earth.

The sheriff, the police chief of Spring Corners, and state and federal law enforcement agents are attempting to arrest Oscar B. Nelde, owner of the farm adjacent to the highway.

This has proved impossible, as Mr. Nelde's house and buildings are equipped with a number of QuietWall units controlled from within.

Boston, February 1, 1978. Dr. R. Milton Schummer, Professor of Sociology at Wellsford College, and a severe critic of "creeping conformism," said tonight, when questioned by reporters, that some of the effects of the QuietWall units constitute a hopeful sign in the long struggle of the individual against the State and

against the forces of conformity. However, Dr. Schummer does not believe that "a mere technological gadget can affect these great movements of sociological trends".

Spring Corners, Iowa, February 2, 1978. A barbed-wire fence four feet high, fastened to crisscrossed railroad rails, now blocks the Cross-State Highway near the farm home of Leroy Weaver, a farmer whose property was cut in half by the highway, and who has often stated that he has received inadequate compensation.

It has proved impossible for highway equipment on the scene to budge either wire or rails.

Mr. Weaver cannot be reached for comment, as his house and buildings are equipped with QuietWall units, and neither the sheriff nor federal officials have been able to effect entry on to the premises.

Washington, D.C., February 3, 1978. The Bureau of Standards reports that tests on QuietWall units show them to be essentially "stasis devices". That is to say, they prevent change in whatever material surface they are applied to. Thus, sound does not pass, because the protected material is practically noncompressible, and is not affected by the alternate waves of compression and rarefaction in the adjacent medium.

Many potential applications are suggested by Bureau of Standards spokesmen who report, for instance, that thin slices of apples and pears placed directly inside the surface field of the QuietWall device were found totally unchanged when the field was switched off, after test periods of more than three weeks.

New York, February 3, 1978. Myron L. Sams, president of QuietWall, Incorporated, reports record sales,

rising day by day to new peaks. QuietWall, Inc., is now operating factories in seven states, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and West Germany.

Spring Corners, Iowa, February 4, 1978. A U.S. Army truck-mounted earth auger has again removed a fence across the Cross-State Highway here. But the giant auger itself has now been immobilised, apparently by one or more concealed stasis (QuietWall) devices.

As the earth auger weighs upwards of thirty tons, and all the wheels of the truck and trailer appear to be locked, moving it presents no small problem.

Los Angeles, February 5, 1978. Police here report the capture of a den of dope fiends and unsavoury characters of all descriptions, after a forty-hour struggle.

The hideout, known as the "Smoky Needle Club", was equipped with sixteen stasis devices manufactured by QuietWall, Inc., and had an auxiliary electrical supply line run in through a drain pipe from the building next door. Only when the electrical current to the entire neighborhood was cut off were the police able to force their way in.

New York, February 5, 1978. Myron L. Sams, president of QuietWall, Inc., announced today a general price cut, due to improved design and volume production economies, on all QuietWall products.

In future, basic QuietWall room units will sell for \$229.95 instead of \$289.95. Special small stasis units, suitable for firming fence posts, reinforcing walls, and providing barred-door household security, will retail for as low as \$19.95. It is rumoured that this price, with improved production methods, still provides an

ample profit for all concerned, so that prices may be cut in some areas during special sales events.

Spring Corners, Iowa, February 6, 1978. A flying crane today lifted the immobilised earth auger from the eastbound lanes of Cross-State Highway.

A total of fourteen small stasis units have thus far been removed from the auger, its truck and trailer, following its removal from the highway by air. Difficulties were compounded by the fact that each stasis unit apparently "freezes" the preceding units applied within its range. The de-stasis experts must not only locate the units. They must remove them in the right order, and some are very cleverly hidden.

Seaton Bridge, Iowa, February 9, 1978. The Cross-State Highway has again been blocked, this time by a wall of cow manure eighty-three feet long, four feet wide at the base, and two and a half feet high, apparently stabilised by imbedded stasis units and as hard as cement. National Guard units are now patrolling the Seaton Bridge section of road to either side of the block.

New York, February 10, 1978. Representatives of QuietWall, Inc., report that study of stasis devices removed from the auger at Spring Centre, Iowa, reveals that they are "not devices of QW manufacture, but crude, cheap bootleg imitations. Nevertheless, they work."

Spring Centre, Iowa, February 12, 1978. The Cross-State Highway, already cut at Seaton Bridge, is now blocked in three places by walls of snow piled up during last night's storm by farmers' bulldozers, and stabilised by stasis devices. Newsmen who visited the scene report that the huge mounds look like snow, but feel

like concrete. Picks and shovels do not dent them, and flame throwers fail to melt them.

New York, February 15, 1978. Dr. J. Paul Hughes, a director of QuietWall, Inc., tonight reiterated his plea for a government ban on stasis devices. He recalled the warning of his inventor grandfather Everett Hughes, and stated that he intends to spend the rest of his life "trying to undo the damage the device has caused".

New York, February 16, 1978. Myron L. Sams, president of QuietWall, Inc., announced today that a fruit fly had been kept in stasis for twenty-one days without suffering visible harm. QW's research scientists, he said, are now working with the problem of keeping small animals in stasis. If successful, Sams said, the experiments may open the door to "one-way time-travel", and enable persons suffering from serious diseases to wait, free from pain, until such time as a satisfactory cure has been found.

Bonn, February 17, 1978. Savage East German accusations against the West today buttressed the rumours that "stasis-unit enclaves" are springing up like toadstools throughout East Germany.

Similar reports are coming in from Hungary, while Poland reports a number of "stasis-frozen" Soviet tanks.

Havana, February 18, 1978. In a frenzied harangue tonight, "Che" Garcia, First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party, announced that the government is erecting "stasis walls" all around the island, and that "stasis blockhouses" now being built will resist "even the Yankees' worst hydrogen weapons". In a torrent of vitriolic abuse, however, Mr. Garcia threatened

that "any further roadblocks and centres of degenerate individualism that spring up will be eradicated from the face of the soil of the motherland by blood, iron, sweat, and the forces of monolithic socialism."

There have been rumours for some time of dissatisfaction with the present regime.

Mr. Garcia charged that the C.I.A. had flagrantly invaded Cuban air space by dropping "millions of little vicious stasis units, complete with battery packs of fantastic power", all over the island, from planes which could not be shot down because they were protected by "still more of these filthy sabotage devices".

Des Moines, February 21, 1978. The Iowa state government following the unsuccessful siege of four farm homes near the Cross-State Highway today announced that it is opening new hearings on landowners' compensation for land taken for highway-construction purposes.

The governor appealed to owners of property adjoining the highway to be patient, bring their complaints to the capital, and meanwhile open the highway to traffic.

Staunton, Vt., February 23, 1978. Hiram Smith, a retired high school science teacher whose family has lived on the same farm since before the time of the Revolution, was ordered last fall to leave his family home.

A dam is to be built nearby, and Mr. Smith's home will be among those inundated.

At the time of the order, Mr. Smith, who lives on the farm with his fourteen-year-old grandson, stated that he would not leave "until carried out dead or helpless."

This morning, the sheriff tried to carry out the eviction order, and was stopped by a warning shot fired

from the Smith house. The warning shot was followed by the flight of a small, battery-powered model plane, apparently radio-controlled, which alighted about two thousand yards from the Smith home, near an old apple orchard.

Mr. Smith called to the sheriff to get out of his car and lie down, if the car was not stasis-equipped, and in any case to look away from the apple orchard.

There was a brilliant flash, a shock, and a roar which the sheriff likened to the explosion of "a hundred tons of TNT". When he looked at the orchard, it was obscured by a pink glow and boiling clouds, apparently of steam from vaporised snow.

Mr. Smith called out to the sheriff to get off the property, or the next "wink bomb" would be aimed at him.

No one has been out to the Smith property since the sheriff's departure.

New York, February 25, 1978. Mr. Myron L. Sams, president of QuietWall, Inc., announced today that "there is definitely no connection between the Staunton explosion and the QW Corp. stasis unit. The stasis unit is a strictly defensive device and cannot be used for offensive purposes".

New York, February 25, 1978. Dr. J. Paul Hughes tonight asserted that the "wink bomb" exploded at Staunton yesterday, and now known to have left a radioactive crater, "probably incorporated a stasis unit". The unit was probably "connected to a light metallic container holding a small quantity of radioactive material. It need not necessarily be the radioactive material we are accustomed to think of as suitable for fission bombs. It need not be the usual amount of such material. When the stasis unit was activated by a radio signal or timing device, high-energy particles

thrown off by the radioactive material would be unable to pass out through the container, now in stasis, and equivalent to a very hard, dense, impenetrable, nearly ideal boundary surface. The high-energy particles would bounce back into the interior, bombarding the radioactive material. As the population of high-energy particles within the enclosing stasis field builds up, the radioactive material, regardless of its quantity, reaches the critical point. Precisely what will happen depends on the radioactive material used, the size of the sample, and the length of the 'wink'—that is, the length of time the stasis field is left on."

Dr. Hughes added that "this is a definite, new, destructive use of the stasis field, which Mr. Myron Sams assures us is perfectly harmless."

Montpelier, Vt., February 26, 1978. The governor today announced temporary suspension of the Staunton Dam Project, while an investigation is carried out into numerous landowners' complaints.

Moscow, February 28, 1978. A "certain number" of "isolated cells" of "stasis-controlled character" are admitted to have sprung up within the Soviet Union. Those that are out of the way are said to be left alone, on the theory that the people have to come out sometime. Those in important localities are being reduced by the Red Army, using tear gas, sick gas, toothache gas, flashing searchlights, "war of nerves" tactics, and, in some cases, digging out of the "cell" and carrying it off wholesale. It is widely accepted that there is nowhere near the amount of trouble here as in the satellite countries, where the problem is mounting to huge proportions.

Spring Corners, Iowa, May 1, 1978. The extensive Cross-State Highway claims having been settled all

around, traffic is once again flowing along the highway. A new and surprising feature is the sight of farm machinery disappearing into tunnels constructed under the road to allow the farmers to pass from one side to the other.

Staunton, Vt., July 4, 1978. There was a big celebration here today as the governor and a committee of legislators announced that the big Staunton Dam Project has been abandoned, and a number of smaller dams will be built according to an alternative plan put forth earlier.

Bonn, August 16, 1978. Reports reaching officials here indicate that the East German government, the Hungarian government, and also to a considerable extent the Polish government, are having increasing difficulties as more and more of the "stasis-unit enclaves" join up, leaving the government on the outside looking in. Where this will end is hard to guess.

Washington, September 30, 1989. The Treasury Department sent out a special "task force" of about one hundred and eighty men this morning. Their job is to crack open the mushrooming Anti-Tax League, whose membership is now said to number about one million enthusiastic businessmen. League members often give Treasury agents an exceedingly rough time, using record books and files frozen shut with stasis units, office buildings stasis-locked against summons-servers, stasis-equipped cars which come out of stasis-equipped garages connected with stasis-locked office buildings, to drive to stasis-equipped homes where it is physically impossible for summons-servers to enter the grounds.

Princeton, N.J., October 5, 1978. A conference of leading scientists, which gathered here today to

exchange views on the nature of the stasis unit, is reported in violent disagreement. One cause of the disagreement is the reported "selective action" of the stasis unit, which permits ordinary light to pass through transparent bodies, but blocks the passage of certain other electromagnetic radiations.

Wild disorders broke out this afternoon during a lecture by Dr. J. Paul Hughes, on the "Quasi-Electron Theory of Wave Propagation". The lecture was accompanied by demonstration of the original Everett Hughes device, powered by an old-fashioned generator driven by the inventor's original steam engine. As the engine gathered speed, Dr. Hughes was able to demonstrate the presence of a nine-inch sphere of completely reflective material in the supposedly empty focus of the apparatus. This sphere, Dr. Hughes asserted, was the surface of a space totally evacuated of quasi-electrons, which he identified as "units of time".

It was at this point that the disturbance broke out.

Despite the disorder, Dr. Hughes went on to explain the limiting value of the velocity of light in terms of the quasi-electron theory, but was interrupted when the vibration of the steam engine began to shake down the ceiling.

There is a rumour here that the conference may recess at once without issuing a report.

Washington, D.C., August 16, 1979. Usually reliable sources report that the United States has developed a "missile screen" capable of destroying enemy missiles in flight, and theoretically capable of creating a wall around the nation through which no enemy projectile of any type could pass. This device is said to be based on the original Everett Hughes stasis unit, which creates a perfectly rigid barrier of variable size

and shape, which can be projected very rapidly by turning on an electric current.

Other military uses for stasis devices include protection of missile sites, storage of food and munitions, impenetrating of armour plate, portable "turtle-shields" for infantry, and quick-conversion units designed to turn any ordinary house or shed into a bombardment-proof strongpoint.

Veteran observers of the military scene say that the stasis unit completely reverses the advantage until recently held by offensive, as opposed to defensive, weapons. This traditionally alternating advantage, supposed to have passed permanently with the development of nuclear explosives, has now made one more pendulum swing. Now, in place of the "absolute weapon", we have the "absolute defence". Properly set up, hydrogen explosions do not dent it.

But if the nation is not to disintegrate within as it becomes impregnable without, officials say we must find some effective way to deal with stasis-protected cults, gangsters, anti-tax enthusiasts, seceding rural districts, space-grabbers, and proprietors of dens. Latest problem is the travelling roadblock, set up by chisellers who select a busy highway, collect "toll" from motorists who must pay or end up in a traffic jam, then move on quickly before police have time to react, and stop again in some new location to do the same thing all over. There must be an answer to all these things, but the answer has yet to be found.

Boston, September 2, 1979. Dr. R. Milton Schummer, Professor of Sociology at Wellsford College, spoke out against "galloping individualism" to an audience of six hundred in Swarton Hall last night.

Professor Schummer charged that America, once the land of co-operative endeavour, is now "a seething hotbed of rampant individualists, protesters, quick-

rich artists, and minute-men of all kinds, each over-reacting violently from a former condition which may have seemed like excessive conformism at the time, but now in the perspective of events appears as a desirable cohesiveness and unity of direction. The result today is the fractionating American with synthetic rough edges and built-in bellicose sectionalism."

What this country needs, said Dr. Shummer, is "co-ordination of aims, unity of purpose, and restraint of difference." But, he concluded, "the reaction is too violent. The trend, like the tide, cannot be reversed by human efforts. In three years, this nation has gone from cohesion to fractionation, from interdependence to chaos, from federalism to splinterism, and the end is not yet. One shrinks at the thought of what the next hundred years may bring."



# ROOFS OF SILVER

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BY GORDON R. DICKSON (1923- )

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*Canadian-born but a longtime resident of Minneapolis, Gordon R. Dickson has earned his living from writing since 1950. Most noted for his "Dorsai" group of novels that range from the past to the far future, he is a multiple Nebula and Hugo Award winner who can also write outstanding fantasy (both "high" and humorous), and can sing with the best the sf field has to offer. To top everything off, he is a heck of a nice fellow.*

*As in much of his work, the outstanding "Roofs of Silver" asks some very important moral questions.*

"Because you're a fool, brother," said Moran.

The words hung on the hot air between them. A small breeze blew through the rectangular window-aperture in the thick mud wall to the rear. Through the window could be seen a bit of garden, a few blue mountain flowers, and the courtyard wall of mud. The breeze disturbed the air but did not cool the room. In an opposite wall, the hide curtain did not quite cover the doorway. The curtain's much-handled edge was scalloped and worn thin. Hot sunlight from the square came through the gap. Beasts like Earth donkeys, with

unnatural-looking splayed hooves, drowsed around the fountain in the center of the square.

"Why don't you call me a donkey?" said Jabe, looking at them.

"Fair enough," said Moran. He sat, gowned and fat among his grain sacks, his slate balanced on his knees, his creased fingers of both hands white with chalk. "Because it's just what you aren't. Any more than those variforms out there are, no matter what they're called."

Jabe moved uneasily. His spurs clinked.

"You think I'm overadapted?" he said.

"No. You're just a fool," said Moran. "As I said and keep saying. You've been here ten years. You started out a liberal and you've become conservative. When you started to work with these settlers, the returns weren't in yet."

"It's not a hundred percent," said Jabe.

"How can it be?" said Moran. "But what's a statistical chance of error of three percent?"

"I can't believe it," said Jabe. "I might have believed it, back on Earth, when these people were just population figures to me. Now, I've lived with them ten years, I can't believe it."

"I've lived with them, too."

"Eight years," said Jabe.

"Long enough. I didn't marry into them, though. That's why my eyes are still clear."

"No," said Jabe. He beat his hands together softly with a curious rhythmic and measured motion until he became suddenly aware of Moran's eyes upon them, and checked their motion, guiltily.

"No," he said again, with an effort. "It can't be true. It must be sociological."

"Indigenous."

"I can't believe that," said Jabe.

"You aren't arguing with me, man," said Moran.

"You're arguing with a ten year survey. I showed you the report. It's not a matter of living conditions or local superstitions. It's a steady progressive deterioration from generation to generation. Already the shift is on from conscience to taboo."

"I haven't seen it."

"You've got a single point of view. And a technologically high level of community at that mine."

"No," said Jabe, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and looking down at Moran. "Report or no report, I'm not condemning a world full of human beings."

Moran sat heavily among the grain sacks.

"Who's condemning?" he said. "It's just quarantine for the present; and you and I and the rest of the agents have to go back."

"You could hold up the report."

"No," said Moran. "You know better than that."

"It could be stolen. The agent bringing it to you could have been knifed."

"No. No," said Moran. "The report goes in." He looked with a twist of anger on his face at Jabe. "Don't you think I feel for them? I've been here almost as long as you have. It's just quarantine for a time—fifty years, maybe."

"And after the fifty years runs out?"

"We'll figure out something in that much time."

"No," said Jabe. "No more than they did on Astarte, or on Hope. They'll sterilize."

"Rather than let them breed back down into the animal."

"There's no danger of that here, I tell you," said Jabe.

"Report says there is," said Moran. "I'm sending it in. It has to be done."

"Earth has to protect Earth, you mean."

Moran sighed heavily.

"All right," he said. "I'm through talking about it. You get yourself ready to leave, along with the other agents—though if you take my advice, the kindest thing you can do for that wife of yours is to leave right now, just vanish."

"I don't think I'll go," said Jabe. "No." His spurs clinked again. "I'm not leaving."

"I haven't any more time to waste with you," said Moran. He twisted around and pulled one of the grain sacks out of position. Behind it was revealed a black board with several buttons and dials upon it. He pressed a button and turned a dial. He spoke to the board.

"Survey ship? I've got an agent here who—"

Jabe leaned down and forward, and struck. Moran choked off in mid sentence and stiffened up. His fat arm came back and up, groping for the knife hilt standing out between his shoulder blades. Then he fell forward, half covering the black board.

"Moran?" said the board in a small, buzzing voice. ". . . Moran? Come in, Moran. . . ."

Two hours later, out on the desert with Alden Mann, who had come into the city with him to buy medicines for the mine, Jabe stopped automatically to rest the horses; and Alden drew up level with him.

"Something on your mind, Jabe Halversen?" said Alden.

"Nothing," said Jabe. "No, nothing." He looked into Alden's frank, younger face, made himself smile, and went back to staring out past Alden at the sherry-colored, wavering distance of the hot sandy plain. Behind him, to the right of their road was the edge of the cultivated area with palmlike trees about thirty feet high.

"Let me know, if," said Alden cheerfully, got out his pipe and began to fill it, throwing one leg over his

saddlehorn. The spur below the floppy leather pantleg flashed the sun for a moment in Jabe's eyes.

"If, I will," answered Jabe automatically. Alden, he thought, was the closest thing to an actual friend that he had. Moran he had known for a long time, but they had not really been close. They had been relatives in a foreign land.

Jabe lit his own pipe. He did not feel guilty, only a hollow sick feeling over the killing of Moran. Over the necessity of his killing Moran. He thought there would be no immediate danger from it. The knife was a city knife he had bought here an hour before for the purpose. He had worn gloves. He had taken Moran's purse, the report and nothing else. The Survey Ship would not be able to identify him as the murderer and send men to arrest him in much less than three months. He should be able to do something in three months. If he did, after that, nothing mattered.

It was good that he had suspected the report's coming. He puffed on his pipe, staring at the sandy distance. He knew where they had gone wrong. But Moran was proof of the fact that argument would be useless. They wanted something concrete.

"I was wild out here, once," said Jabe, to Alden.

"Yeah," Alden glanced at him, with some sympathy. "Nobody holds it against you, any more."

"I still don't belong."

"For me, you do. And for Sheila." Alden blew smoke at him. "When your son's born he'll have a place on the staff of the mine."

"Yes," said Jabe. His thoughts veered. "You people never had much to do with the wild ones."

"Oh, we shoot a few every year."

"Did you ever keep any for a while? Just to get a notion of what makes them tick?"

"No," said Allen. "We're miners with work to do."

If one gets caught, he's hung; and we're back on the job in an hour."

"You didn't hang me."

"That was different," said Alden. "You came in with that trader's pack train; and when it was time to leave Sheila spoke for you."

"You didn't maybe take me for a trader crewman, myself?"

"Oh no," said Alden. "We knew. You can tell, a wild one."

"I'm surprised," said Jabe, a little sadly, "you'd want to risk it."

"If Sheila spoke for you—" Alden shrugged. He stared at Jabe. "What got you thinking of wild ones?"

"Nothing," said Jabe. "The sand, I guess."

It was not true, of course. What had started him was the knowledge of his advantage over Moran and the rest. All the other agents on this world had played one role, one character. By chance of luck, or fate, it had fallen on him to play two. He had not meant to be taken up by the community around the silver mine back in the mountains. It had merely happened. Love had happened—to himself as well as Sheila. And the Survey Ship, concerned only with its routine hundred-year check on this planetful of emigrants from old Earth, had okayed his change of status.

The result, he thought now, as the smoke of the pipe came hot from low in the bowl of it, almost burned out, was that he had two points of view where Moran and the rest had one. Two eyes instead of one, binocular vision instead of the one-dimensional view a single seeing organ could achieve. There was a recessive strain cropping up on this world, all right; but it was carried and spread by the wild ones—the degenerate individuals that had neither clan nor community to uphold them.

And the check to it, he was sure, was right in his

own adopting community. The tight-held social unit of the mine-people, who had preserved their purity of strain by keeping the degenerates killed off and at a distance. There was no doubt in his mind that if he had been actually a wild one, Sheila would never have been attracted to him, or he to her. It was because, though she did not know it, he was unalloyed with the spreading degeneracy of this world—as she herself was pure, untainted silver like that the mine refinery turned out of the common, mingled ore of the mountains—that she had demanded him of the trader.

He knocked his pipe out on his boot. And there was the answer, he thought. A natural tendency to breed for the best that was a counter-force to what Moran and the others had discovered. In the long run, the superior, pure breed would kill off the degenerates. All he had to do was prove it to the Survey Ship.

Only, for that he needed a specimen of each type. One of the miner people would not be hard to come by. But he would need one of the wild ones as well. After that, it was up to the testing facilities of the Survey Ship to monitor and make findings. But the findings could only substantiate what he already knew.

And that was the important thing. For himself, he had burnt his bridges with the knife he had driven into Moran. But Sheila and his unborn son would be safe.

"Let's get on," he said to Alden. Alden knocked out his own pipe and the two horses went forward once more. The gait of their wide hoofs—not splayed so badly as were the hooves of the donkeys but spread for the sand as camel hooves are spread—was smooth. Jabe wondered how it could be done—attracting one of the wild ones. He and Alden would be passing through wild territory in the early part of the mountains. But bait was needed.

After a while a thought came to him. He reached

down and unhooked one of the large silver buckles from his boot. Alden, riding a little ahead, did not notice. As they rode on, Jabe set himself to rubbing the buckle to a high shine on the pants' leg hidden from Alden by the horse's bulk.

When they saw the first low crests of the mountains rising ahead of them, Jabe stuck the buckle into the headband of his wide-brimmed hat—on the side away from Alden.

When darkness came, they camped. They were only a few hours from the mine; but they were deep in the mountains. In a little shallow opening in the rocks, all but clear of scrub variform pine and native bush, they lit a fire, and ate. Alden rolled himself early in his blankets; but Jabe sat up, feeding the fire and frowning into its licking flames.

He had not even reached for the chunk of dead limb, an hour or so later. He had only thought about it—his hand had not yet moved—but some preliminary tensing of the body must have given him away, because the voice, dry as the desert wind that had followed them all through the day, whispered suddenly in his ear.

"Don't move, mister."

He did not move. His rifle was lying across his spread knees, its trigger guard scant inches from his right index finger, but the whisper had come from the dark immediately behind him; and a thrown knife takes very little time to cover the distance a whisper can carry, even in the stillness of a mountain night. He glanced past the flames of the fire to where the dim shape of the blanket-wrapped body of Alden lay like a long, dark log against the further rim of darkness. But whether Alden slept or waked, whether he had heard the whisper or not, the young miner gave no sign of being aware of what was happening.

"Reach out with your right arm. Slow," said the whisperer. "Fill me a cup of that coffee and hand it back. And don't you turn, mister."

Jabe moved slowly as he had been told. The last word had been pronounced *turun*. The accentual difference from the speech of Alden announced a wild one, one of the groupless wandering savages roaming about the deserted lands. The speaker behind Jabe—was he a man, or a woman?—used his words like a child, with singsong cadences.

Slowly and steadily, Jabe passed back the full cup without turning. He felt it taken from him and heard the soft noise of drinking.

"Fill again, mister." The cup was sitting again, empty, at his side. "Fill yourself, too."

Jabe obeyed.

"What do you want?" he asked, when he had his own hot, full cup between his hands. He stared into the flames, waiting for the answer.

"Some things. That silver do-thing in your hat. Some talk. You riders from that mine town?"

"Yes," said Jabe. He had been easing his hand, a milimeter at a time toward the rifle on his knees. He found himself whispering his answer. If Alden still slumbered, so much the better. The rifle on his knees was like any that the mine people carried, but there was an anesthetic cartridge in its chamber now instead of an ordinary shell.

"It's them goats, you're after?"

"Goats?" said Jabe. The community of the mine kept goats for hide and meat. He had been set to guarding some himself in the beginning, before his marriage ceremony with Sheila. Usually the old people watched them. "Some strays?"

"They aren't not strays," came back the answer. "One's eat and the other two butchered ready to eat. They's mine now."

"You stole them."

"Was you never hungry, mister?"

"Yes," said Jabe. "I was wild once, myself."

He sat waiting for the response to that. It was one of the things he had hoped would help. In addition to the bullet that was not a bullet in his gun, there were other things that belonged to him as an agent. There was a matchbox in his pocket that was not a matchbox, but an emotional response recorder. A moment's cooperation, a moment's relaxation from the wild one behind him was all that he needed. A chance to bring the rifle to bear. And meanwhile, the recorder was running. He had started it the minute Alden had rolled up and turned away in his blankets.

"Then you know," said the whisperer. "You know it, then." There was a moment of pause. "It's rich you is, down there at that mine. I seen the pack trains come and go. I seen the goats. And I seen you all down there, all rich with silver."

"The silver," said Jabe, "you like the silver?"

"Mighty rich, you is. All that silver."

"We have to mine for it," said Jabe. "We have to make it." He could not feel the recorder in his pocket, but he knew it was there, taking down the colors of the wild one's responses. "It isn't just there to be picked up."

"Yeah," there was something almost like a whispery chuckle behind him. "I found her so, watching. I couldn't walk down in through your gates, not me. But I took t'myself a high place and watched—all day, the fire going in the tall building and the bright silver things about the town. And the women with silver on them, so that they shine here and there in the sun, coming and going down there tween the houses. And the houses, all the big ones and the little ones with roofs of silver."

"Roofs—?" said Jabe; and then to his mind's eye

came a picture of the corrugated metal sheathing—dating indestructibly back over a hundred years to the first coming of the settlers to this world, and the first establishment of the mine. “But they’re—”

“What, mister?”

“Part of the buildings,” said Jabe, “that’s all—”

A whispery laugh sounded in his ear.

“Don’t fear, mister. I tell you something. If it were me comin in with horses and men to take all you got, I wouldn’t let nobody touch them roofs, but leave them there, for the sun to shine on. I never seen nothing so fine, so fine anywhere, as them roofs of silver all to-shine in the sun.” The whisper changed a little in tone, suddenly. “You feel that way too, don’t you, mister?”

“Yes,” said Jabe, out of a suddenly dry throat.

“Oh, yes. The roofs—the roofs, all silver.”

“I tell you what,” said the whisperer. “I take this from your hat—” Jabe felt the buckle lightly plucked from his hatband. “And I got some other little silver bits from your saddles. But I want you to know, I’m to-make me little houses and roof them houses with the silver, just like yours, and come day put them out for the sun to bright-shine on. So you know your silver, it in the sun.”

“Good,” said Jabe, whispering. His throat was still dry.

“And now mister—don’t move—” said the voice from behind him. “I got to—”

The whispered words ceased suddenly. Caught in a sudden cold ecstasy of fear, Jabe sat frozen, the breath barely trickling in and out of his throat. *For Sheila, he prayed internally, for all of them at the mine—not now. Don’t let me be killed now. . . .* The long seconds bled away into silence. Then, a far shout broke the plaster cast of his tension.

“Alden! Jabe! Coming up!”

In one motion, Jabe snatched up his rifle and whirled, to face the darkness beyond the firelight behind him. But it hung there before him empty. And even as he relaxed and turned away from it, there rode up from the other side of the fire, three of the mine men on nervous horses, their rifle barrels gleaming in the light of the fire.

"We were after a goat lifter; and the hounds started baying off this way. We rode over from our camp," said Jeff Connel, the assay engineer, as he led the way in. His long dark face gleamed under gray hair as he looked down into Jabe's face. "What's the matter with Alden, sleeping like that?"

"Alden!" Jabe turned and stepped over the fire to shake his friend out of his blankets. Alden rolled over at the first touch, his head lolling backward.

His throat had been neatly cut.

Their return to the mine with Alden's body took place in silence. Jabe rode in their midst, aware of their attitude, whether right or wrong. When two men went out from the mine together on a journey, one was responsible for the other, no matter what the circumstances. He could accept that; it was part of their customs. But what touched him with coldness now was the fact that he seemed to feel suspicion in them. Suspicion of the fact that it had been him who lived, while Alden was murdered.

That suspicion might block his chance of getting a clean recording from one of them to place in comparison with the recording he had made of the wild one. And the recording was all he had, now. Back by the fire, he had been full of hope. If he could have captured the wild one and compared his recording with Alden's when he awoke Alden to tell him of the capture. . . . But there had never been any hope of waking Alden.

Still, there was a sort of chill hope in him. He did have the recording he had made. And he had himself to make a recording of, for control purposes. It was not impossible, it was still quite possible, that he could get a parallel recording yet from another of the mine people. It was a field sort of expedient, but the Survey Ship could not ignore it. If they were faced with three recordings of responses to parallel situations, and there was an identity between the two belonging to Jabe and one of the mine people, and a variance between those two and the wild one, they would have to check further.

With luck, they would send down assistance to capture at least one miner and one savage and take them, drugged, to the ship for full tests. And then. . . .

The sad caravan carrying Alden's body had wound its way through the mine streets picking up a cortege of women and children following, for the available men were out on the hunt as the three who had come on Jabe and Alden had been. At the mine manager's house they stopped, brought in the body of Alden and told their story. Lenkhart, the mine manager, stood with his gray eyes in a bearded face, watching Jabe as they talked. But he said nothing in blame—if nothing in comfort. He beat his hands together with a curious rhythmic and measured motion; and dismissed them to their homes.

Sheila was kinder.

"Jabe!" she said; and held him, back at last in the privacy and safety of their own home. "It might have been you, killed!"

"I know," he said. He sat down wearily. "But it was Alden."

"Oh, that animal!" said Sheila with sudden violence. "That *animal*! They ought to burn him at the pass and leave him there as a warning to the rest!"

He felt a certain sense of shock.

"Sheila," he said. She looked at him. She was a slim, tall girl with heavy, black hair. Under that hair her eyes seemed darker, in this moment, than he had ever seen them before, and almost feverish. "He didn't burn Alden. Alden probably never even woke up."

"But he's an animal—a wild animal!" she cried again. "If he is a man, that is. It might be one of those horrible women. Was it a woman, Jabe?"

He caught a new note of hatred in the new question, the thought that it might have been a woman. He had never seen her like this—he had not known she could be so dangerous where things close to her were concerned. He thought of the child she was carrying and a little fear came for a moment into the back of his mind.

"I don't think so. No," he said. He felt the lie like a heavy weight on him. For it had been impossible to tell the sex of the whisperer. Weariness swept over him like a smothering wave. "Let's go to bed."

In the obscurity and privacy of their bed, later, she held him tightly.

"They'll get him tomorrow," she whispered. And she was fiercely loving. Later, much later, when he was sure that she slept heavily, he rose quietly in the dark and went into the living room-dining room of their three room cottage, and extracting the recorded strip from the imitation of a matchbox, processed it. In the little light of an oil lamp, he held it up to examine it behind closed shades. And his breath caught for a second.

An angry fate seemed to pursue him. The strip was a long band of colors, a code for emotional profile that he could read as well as the men up on the Survey Ship. And the profile he read off now was that of a lone savage all right, but by some freak of luck one with crippled but burning talents—talents far sur-

passing even Jabe's own. In the range of artistic perception, the profile of the whisperer shone powerfully with a rich and varied spectrum of ability and desire—wherever the silver roofs had been mentioned.

Dropping the proof of a bitter exception to all he knew about the wild ones, Jabe beat his hands together with the rhythm of measured frustration among the people of the mine.

In the morning, the men that could be spared formed for the posse in the open space below the mine buildings and above the houses. There were some forty of them, including Jabe; all superbly mounted, all armed with rifles, side-arms and knives. Every two man unit had a saddle radio. The hounds, leashed, bayed and milled in their pack.

Standing on the platform from which mine meetings were held, the mine manager laid out the orders of the hunt. A senior engineer for many years before he had become manager, Lenkhart was stooped and ascetic-looking, with his long gray beard.

"Now," he said to them, "—man or woman, he can't have gone far since last night if he's on foot. And a man on horseback doesn't need to steal goats. You'll stay in contact with radios at all times. At the sign of any maurader or his trail, fire two spaced shots in the air. If you hear the shots fired by someone else, wait for radio orders from the senior engineer of your group before moving in. Any questions?"

There were none. To Jabe, watching, there was a heart-warming quality in the cool, civilized way they went about it. He was paired, himself, with Sheila's father for the hunt. He reined over next to the older man and they all moved out together. The hounds, loosed at last from their leashes, yelped and belled, streaming past them.

They moved as a group for the first two hours, back

to the camp where Alden had been killed. And from there they fanned out, picked up the trail of the whisperer, running northwest and quartering away from the mining town, then, a little later, lost the trail again. They split up into pairs, each pair with a hound or two, and began to work the possible area.

Sheila's father had said little or nothing during the early part of the ride. And Jabe had been busy thinking of his own matters. There must, he had told himself desperately, again and again after the moment of discovering the freakish quality of the whisperer's profile, be some way yet of saving the situation. Now, as they turned into a maze of small canyons, hope on the wings of an idea suddenly returned to him.

He had been assuming that the whisperer's profile was useless as a means to point up the relative purity of one of the mine people. But this need not be so. The recorder took down only what it was exposed to. If he could make a recording of the whisperer where roofs of silver and all the area of the whisperer's artistic perception was carefully avoided—the wild one would show in the color code as only the lonely savage he was. All the primitiveness, the bluntedness of the whisperer would be on show—his degeneracy in all other fields. A recording of any of the other mine people, and a recording of Jabe, matched with this second attempt, would show Jabe and the mine person's profile falling into one separate class, and the whisperer's into another. Better yet—the whisperer would be executed when he was caught. There would then be no chance of the Survey Ship sending down to make other recordings of the whisperer as a check. All that was necessary was to find the chance to make the second recording, under conditions that would be favorable. And if the whisperer was captured and held for a day or so while a trial was being set up, the chance would be there for the finding. . . .

"Jabe," said Sheila's father. "Pull up."

Jabe reined his horse to a halt and turned to face his father-in-law. Tod Harnung had called a halt in a little amphitheater of scrub pine and granite rock. As Jabe watched, the older man threw one leg over his saddle and began to fill his pipe. Like all who had achieved the status of engineer, he wore a beard, and his beard had only a few streaks of gray in it. His straight nose, his dark eyes like Sheila's, above the beard, were not unkind as they looked at Jabe now.

"Smoke if you like," he said.

"Thank you, sir," said Jabe. Gratefully, he got out his own pipe and tobacco, which he had not dared reach for before. The "*sir*" no longer stuck in his throat as it had in his first days among these people. He understood these signs of authority in a small, compact society which had persisted virtually unchanged since the planet's first settlement, a hundred and sixteen years before. It was such things, he was convinced, that had kept the pure silver of their strain unalloyed by the base metals of the disintegrating wild ones and the softening people of the desert and lower lands. By harshness and rigidity, they had kept themselves shining bright.

Even, he thought, lighting his pipe—and it was a suddenly startling thought—in comparison to the very Earth strain in the Survey Ship now presuming to sit in judgement upon them. For the first time Jabe found himself comparing his own so-called "most-civilized" Earth strain with these hard-held descendants of pioneers. In such as Moran, in agents and sociologists, even in himself, wasn't there a softness, a selfish blindness bolstered by the false aid of many machines and devices?

He thought of himself as he had been ten years ago. Even five years ago. He was still largely of Earth, then, still hesitant, fumbling and unsure. He could

never then have reacted so swiftly, so surely, and so decisively to Moran's announcement about the report. Above all, he could not have killed Moran, even if he had seen the overwhelming necessity of it. This world, and in particular, the people of the mine here, had pared him down to a hard core of usefulness.

"—Sir?" he said, for Sheila's father had just spoken to him again. "I didn't catch just what you said, Mr. Harnung."

"I said—you don't by any chance know this killer, do you?"

Jabe looked sharply up from the pipe he was just about to light. He sat in his saddle, the pipe in one hand, the match in the other.

"Know him?" said Jabe.

"Do you?"

"Why—no!" said Jabe. "No sir. Of course not. I don't, why should I?"

Tod Harnung took his own pipe out of his bearded mouth.

"Sheila's my only child," he said. "I've got a grandson to think of."

"I don't understand," said Jabe, bewildered.

The dark eyes looked at him, above the beard.

"My grandson," said Harnung, harshly, "will one day be an engineer like I am. There's going to be no stain on his reputation, nothing to make him be passed over when a vacancy occurs in one of the senior positions." There was a moment's silence.

"I see," said Jabe. "You mean, me."

"There'll be no fault about his mother's line. I'm responsible for that," said Harnung. "I've always hoped there would be no fault about his father, to be remembered against him, either."

Jabe felt himself stirred by a profound emotion.

"I swear," he said, "I never saw or heard that wild

one before in my life! Alden was my friend—you know that!"

"I always thought so," said Harnung.

"You know—" said Jabe, reining his horse close to the older man, "—you know how much Sheila means to me, what you all mean to me. You know what it's meant for me to be accepted here as Sheila's husband among people—" Jabe's voice cracked a little in spite of himself. "—people with a firm, solid way of life. People who know what they are and what everybody else is. All my life, I wanted to find people who were sure of themselves, sure of the way the universe works and their own place in it. I always hated the business of not being completely sure, of only being mostly right, of having to guess and never having anyone in authority to turn to. And do you think—" cried Jabe, "I'd throw that away, all that, for some moronic savage?"

He stopped, shaking a little, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. For a moment, he thought he had said too much. But then Harnung's eyes, which had been steady on him, relaxed.

"No," said Harnung. "I don't believe you would." He nodded at Jabe's pipe. "Go ahead and light up there. I had to make sure, Jabe. I have my responsibility as Sheila's father."

"Yes sir, I understand." Fingers still trembling a little, Jabe got his pipe lit. He drew the smoke gratefully deep into his lungs.

"Very well, then," said Harnung. "As soon as you've finished your pipe, we'll get on."

"Sir!" said Jabe. An idea had just come to him. He took his pipe out of his mouth, and turned quickly to the other man. "I just thought of something."

Harnung peered at him.

"Yes?"

"I just remembered something that killer said—"

Jabe put his hand on the pommel of Harnung's saddle to hold the two horses together as they began to grow restive with the halt. "He said he'd been watching the town from some high place close at hand. Now we've circled almost a full turn back toward the town. Right ahead of us is a spot where we can cut over to the rock faces north of town. I'll bet that's where he's holed up."

Harnung frowned.

"He'd have had to cut back through us earlier to be there now," the older man said. "How could he have cut through us—and past the hounds?"

"Some of these desert runners could do it," Jabe said. "Believe me, sir. I know from when I was one of them. It's worth a try. And if I'm the one to lead us to where we capture him—"

Harnung scratched his beard with the stem of his pipe.

"I don't know," he said. "I'll have to radio and ask permission for you and I to try it. And if we get it, we'll be leaving a hole in the search pattern when we drop out. If it turned out later, he got away through that hole . . ."

"I give you my word, sir—"

"All right," said Harnung, abruptly. "I'll do it." He picked up his radio set from the saddle before him and rang the senior engineer of the search. He listened to the answering voice for a minute.

"All right," he said at last, and put the radio back. "Come on, Jabe."

They reined their horses around and went off in a new direction. The impatient hound that had been waiting with them leaped hungrily ahead once more, the red tongue lolling out of its mouth.

They angled their approach so as to come up on the blind side of the heights of rock north of the mine

town. It was past noon when they reached the first of these and they began slowly to work around the perimeter of the rocks. This part of the mountain was all narrow canyons and sudden upthrusts of granite. The sun moved slowly, as slowly as they, across the high and cloudless sky above, as they prospected without success.

It was not until nearly mid-afternoon that the hound, running still ahead of them up a narrow cut in the rock, checked, stiffened, and whimpered, lifting her nose in the air. She turned sharply and trotted up a slope to the right, where she paused again, sniffing the breeze.

The two men looked off in the direction she pointed.

"The Sheep's Head!" said Jabe. "Sir, he's up on the Sheep's Head. He has to be. And there's only one way down from there."

"He couldn't see much from there unless he wanted to climb away out—well, let's look," said Harnung. They put their horses to a trot and went up the slope to emerge from the canyon and cut to their right up around an overhanging lump of bare rock that was the base of the granite pinnacle known from its shape as the Sheep's Head.

The hound was eager. A sharp command from Harnung held her to no more than the customary five yards in front of the horse's heads, but she shivered and danced with the urge to run. Breasting a steeper slope as they approached the top of the pinnacle, the two riders were forced to slow to a walk. The bald dome of the Sheep's Head was just a short distance vertically above them.

They were perhaps a hundred feet from a view of the summit, when the hound suddenly belled, loud and clear. Looking up together, they saw a flicker of movement, disappearing over the shoulder of the

Sheep's Head. Harnung and Jabe angled their horses off in that direction, but when Jabe would have forced his animal to a trot, Harnung laid his hand on the reins.

"We'll catch him now," he said. "A walk's good enough."

"Yes sir," said Jabe.

They walked their horses on up to the crest of the rise, the hound dancing ahead of them. As they came level with the top they found themselves at the head of a long gully, cutting away down from the side of the Sheep's Head, out toward a smaller pinnacle of rock. A few short yards to the right of them, they saw all the litter of a cold camp; the half-demolished carcasses of the missing goats, and some little, toylike objects the tops of which caught the glitter of the sun. Jabe reined his horse over to them, and reached down. They were all attached to a smoothed piece of wood; and they came up as a group as he leaned from his saddle to scoop them in. Sitting in the saddle, he stared at them. Proof of the artistic perception he had read in the whisperer's profile glowed before him. They were tiny models of buildings with pieces of silver fitted onto them for roofs. And it was not just that they were well-made—it was more than that. Some genius of the maker had caught the very feel and purpose of the mine and the life of their people, in their making.

"Jabe!" snapped Harnung. "Come along!"

Jabe turned his horse to join the older man, slipping the piece of wood with the house models into his saddlebag. They headed together at a steady trot up the slope and down into the mouth of the gully.

Harnung was talking into the radio, the black bush of his bearded lips moving close to its mouthpiece.

"The rest'll move in behind us," he said to Jabe,

replacing the radio on his saddle. "But we'll be the ones to take him. Let's go."

They trotted down the gully, which deepened now, and narrowed. Its walls rose high around them. The winding semi-level upon which they traveled was clear except for the occasional rock or boulder. The almost vertical rock of the walls was free of vegetation except for the occasional clump of brush. After a little distance, they came to another gully cutting off at near right angles; and the hound informed them with whines and yelps that the fugitive had taken this new way.

They followed.

Coming around a corner suddenly, they faced him at last. There had been no place else for him to go. This gully was blind. He stood with his back against the further rock of the gully's end, a long knife balanced in one hand in throwing position. A thin, gangling figure in scraggly beard and dirt-darkened hide clothing. At the sight of them, he flipped his hand with the knife back behind his head ready to throw; and Harnung shot him through the shoulder to bring him down.

They brought their prisoner back to the town as the last rays of the sunset were fading from the peaks where he had secretly looked down on the life of the mine. They locked him in a toolshed behind the ore-crushing mill and split up among their various homes. Word had gone on ahead of how they wild one had been taken. Sheila was waiting in their living room for Jabe. She opened her arms to him.

"Jabe!" she said. "You did it! It was *you* that led them to him!" She hugged him; but something he was holding got in her way. "What's that?"

"Nothing." He reached out and dropped the piece of wood with the little silver-roofed houses on it, down

on the table beside her. "He used my silver buckle to make the roofs on them—the buckle he took from me when Alden was killed." He put his arms around her, and kissed her.

"Eat now," she said, leading him to the table. "You haven't had anything decent since breakfast." He let her steer him to his chair. She had set the table as if for a celebration, with a fresh tablecloth and some blue mountain flowers in a vase.

She sat with him. She had waited to eat until he should get back. She wanted to know all about the hunt. He listened to her questions and, a little uneasily, thought he caught an echo of the doubt that had been in the mind of her father, a doubt about his loyalty to the mine people. She did not doubt now, but earlier she must have, he thought, and now she was trying to make up for it. She came back again and again to the matter of the marauder's execution.

". . . I suppose it'll be hanging, though burning's too good for someone like—"

"Sheila!" he put his coffee cup down again in the saucer so hard some of it spilled. "Can't you at least wait until I'm done eating?"

She stared at him.

"What's the matter?" she wanted to know.

"Nothing. Nothing . . ." he picked up the cup carefully again, but it trembled slightly in his hand, in spite of all he could do. "We have to be just, that's all. It's a matter of justice with this man."

"But he killed Alden!" Her eyes were quite large; and he moved uncomfortably under their look.

"Of course. Of course . . ." he said. "A murderer has to be punished. But you have to remember the man's limitations. He isn't like you or me—or Alden was. He hasn't any sense of right or wrong as we know it. He operates by necessity, by taboo, or superstition. That's why—" he looked appealingly at her, "we

mustn't lose our own perspective and get down to his own animal level. We have to execute him—it's necessary. But we shouldn't hate him for being something he can't control."

"But Alden was your friend!" she said. "Doesn't that mean anything to you, Jabe? What's all this about the creature mean, beside the fact Alden was your friend?"

"I know he was my friend!" Even as he lost his temper with her, he knew it was the wrong thing to do, the wrong way to handle the situation. "Do you think I don't know—he was the only friend I had in this place! But I happen to know what it's like to be like that man we've got locked up in the toolshed!"

"You were never like that!" she cried.

"I was."

"You were a freighter on a pack train. You had a job. You weren't a crawling thief of a murderer like that!"

"But you remembered that I might have been. Didn't you?" He half-rose from the table, shouting. He wanted to throw the accusation squarely in her face. "Last night you remembered that—"

"No!" she cried, suddenly, jumping to her feet. "You had to make me do that! And not last night. Just now! You had to mention yourself in the same breath with that animal, that crawling beast in the shape of a man!"

"He is not," said Jabe, trying to make an effort to speak slowly and calmly, "an animal yet. He is only on the way to being one. We who can still think like human beings—"

"Human!" she cried, "He's a filthy wild animal and he doesn't deserve to be hung. Why do you say he isn't? Why is it everything that's perfectly plain and straight and right to everybody else gets all tangled up when you start hashing it over? Alden was your friend

and this wild one killed him. It doesn't seem bad enough that creature already stole goats that took the food out of people's mouths. Maybe even the mouth of your own son, next winter—"

"Why, there's not going to be any shortage of food—" he began, but she had gone right on talking.

"—not even that. But he killed your friend. And you say he ought to be dealt with, but you want me to feel bad about it at the same time. Nothing I do ever is right, according to you! I'm always wrong, always wrong, according to you! If you feel like that all the time why did you marry me in the first place—"

"You know why I married you—"

"No I don't!" she cried. "I never did!" And she turned and ran from him, suddenly. The bedroom door slammed behind him; and he heard the bolt to it snap shut.

Silence held the house. He got up and went across to the cupboard on the opposite wall. He opened it and took out a small thick bottle of the whisky made at the mine still. For a moment he held it; and then he put it back. Reason returned to him. He felt for the recorder in his pocket. It was there; and he turned toward the door.

Quietly, he let himself out of the house.

The toolshed where the whisperer was held was unguarded and locked only by a heavy bar across the door on the outside. In the darkness, he merely lifted the bar from the door and stepped inside. For a moment he could see nothing; and then as his eyes adjusted to the deeper gloom, the lights on the outer wall of the ore-crushing mill, striking through the gaps between the heavy planks of the toolshed wall, showed him the wild one, tightly bound.

"Hello," he said, feeling the word strange on his lips. A gaunt whisper replied to him.

"I mighty thirsty, mister."

He heard the words with a feeling of shock. He went back outside the shed to a pipe down the hill, filled the tin cup hanging from it and brought it back. The prisoner drank, gulping.

"I thank you, mister."

"That's all right," he said. Reaching in his pocket, he started the recorder. He searched for the expression on the prisoner's face in the darkness, but all he could make out was a vague blur of features and any expression was hidden. It did not matter, he thought.

Skillfully, he began to question the prisoner. . . .

He woke with a sudden jerk and came fully awake. For a second he felt nothing and then the cruel, dry hands of a hangover clamped unyielding upon his head and belly. He could not remember for a moment what had happened. He lay still, on his back, staring at the ceiling above his bed and trying to remember what had happened. Bright sunlight was coming around the edges of the curtain on the window; and Sheila was not in the bed with him:

He must be late for work—but Sheila would never have permitted that. He tried once more to put the previous evening together in his mind; and slowly, it came back.

He had got a good recording from the wild one. He had not even had to look at it to know that it was what he wanted. The prisoner was like any creature in a trap and there was nothing in him of the dangerous perception Jabe had found earlier. He had got a good recording, and after it was over, he had cautioned the prisoner against telling anyone else about the interview. But it did not really matter whether the prisoner spoke or not. They would think, whoever heard it, that Jabe had simply stumbled in on the man while drunk—to taunt or bully him.

For Jabe had made sure that he was drunk, later. But first he had made a parallel recording of himself, and one of the supervisors on night shift at the ore-crusher mill; and broadcast the results of all three to the Survey Ship from a transmitter hidden behind his own house. Then he had gone over to the bachelor's barracks to make sure of his alibi for the evening. There was always a group drinking at the barracks and it was the natural place for a husband who had just had a fight with his wife.

When he stumbled home at last, he had found the bedroom door unbolted.

Now, lying in the bed, he wondered again at the lateness of the morning hour. A thought came to him. Perhaps he had been allowed the day off by the mine manager, because of his usefulness in capturing the prisoner. He listened, but could not hear Sheila in the next room. He rolled over and saw a note from her on the bedside table.

*"—Back soon, darling. Breakfast on the stove to warm."*

Things were evidently well once more between them. He thought of the three profiles safely messaged off to the Survey Ship the night before and a great sense of relief and happiness rose in him. He rolled out of bed and headed for the shower.

By the time he was showered, dressed, and shaved, the hangover had all but disappeared. He drew the curtain on the bedroom window and looked out on a mid-morning bright with the clear mountain sunshine. Up the little slope behind the house, near the storage shed where his transmitter hid, a clump of the same blue flowers Sheila had filled into the vase the evening before, were growing wild. Their heads stirred in the small breeze passing by, and they struck him suddenly as a token of good luck.

He turned away from the window, walked across

the bedroom, and pushing open the door to the main room of the house, stepped into it. The room was clean, tidied-up, and empty of Sheila's presence; but he had not taken more than a step into it, before he was aware of his invisible visitors.

The first glimpse showed only a sort of wavering of the air in two corners of the room—and that was all anyone but he, or one of the other agents, would have seen. He, however, now that he had become aware of them, felt a small device implanted in the bone of his skull begin to operate. The wavering fogged, then cleared; and he saw watching him two men from the Survey Ship, both armed and in uniform. They were, it seemed to him, remarkably young-looking; and he did not know their names. But there was nothing so surprising in that, for the personnel of the ship had turned over a number of times since he had first been landed on this world.

"Well, this is quick," he said. The lips of one of them moved and a voice sounded inside Jabe's ear.

"I'm afraid you're under arrest," the voice said. "You'll have to come up with us."

"Under arrest?"

"For the killing of—" the one speaking hesitated for a tiny moment, "—your brother."

"Brother. . . ." Jabe stopped suddenly. About him everything else seemed to have halted, too. Not merely the room and the people in it, but the world in its turning beneath them, seemed to have stopped with the word he had just heard. "Brother? . . . Oh, yes, Moran." The world and all things started to move again. He felt strangely foolish to have hesitated over the word. "Moran Hayversen. We were never very close. . . ." His mind cleared suddenly. "How did you find out so soon it was me?" he asked.

Outside, at some little distance off, there was a sudden outburst of cheering. It seemed to come from the

open space where they had gathered yesterday for the hunt. It drowned out the answer of the man from the ship, in his mind.

"What?" Jabe had to ask.

"I say," said the man from the ship, "your profile was one of the three you sent up to the ship, some hours ago. It showed aberrancies of pattern. It was too much of a coincidence, taken with the recent death of—Moran Halversen. We checked; and there was a good deal of indication it was you."

"I see," said Jabe. He nodded. "I—expected it," he said. "Not so soon."

"Shall we go, then?" said the man from the ship.

"Could we wait a few minutes? A minute or two?" said Jabe. He turned to look out the window. "My wife . . . she ought to be back in just a few minutes."

The man from the ship glanced at his watch, and then over at the other man from the ship. Jabe could feel rather than hear them inside his ear, speaking to each other on another channel.

"We can wait a few minutes, I guess," said the one who had done all the talking. "But just a few."

"She'll be right back, I'm sure," said Jabe. He moved to the window looking out on the narrow, sloping cobblestoned street before the row of houses of which this was one. "You'll make sure she doesn't see me go?"

"Sure," said the man from the ship. "We can take care of that all right. She'll just forget you were here when she got here."

"Thank you," said Jabe. "Thanks. . . ." He turned away from the window. People were beginning to hurry down the street from the direction of the open space; but he did not see Sheila. He moved back into the room, and caught sight of the board with the little model houses, still on the table.

"I'll take this," he said, picking it up. He turned to

the one who had been doing the speaking. "So the three recordings got through all right?"

The two from the ship looked at each other.

"Yes—" said one. There was a sudden rapid step outside the house. The door burst open and Sheila almost ran in. Her face was flushed and happy.

"Jabe!" she cried. "We're going to have a dance! Isn't that wonderful? Manager Lenkhart just announced it!—Did you get your breakfast yet? How do you like the holiday?" She spun about gleefully. "And—guess?"

"What?" he said, filling his eyes with the sight of her.

"Why, they're going to burn him after all! Up at the pass. Isn't that marvelous? And we'll all have an outdoor dinner up there, and burn him just as it starts to get dark, then everybody comes back here for the dance. Isn't that wonderful, Jabe? We haven't had a dance for so long!"

He stood staring at her.

"Burn?" he said stupidly. "Burn? But why. . . ."

"Oh, *Jabe!*" she pirouetted about to face him. "Because we haven't caught one like this for such a long time, of course." She held out her arms to him. "Everybody thought because production in the mine wasn't up last month, Manager Lenkhart wouldn't let us have anything but an ordinary hanging. But the staff engineers pleaded with him and said how badly everybody needed a holiday—so we got the whole thing." She reached for him, but he stepped back, instinctively. "Burning, and picnic, and dance. . . ! Jabe—" she said, stopping, and looking at him in some puzzlement. "What's wrong? Aren't you happy—"

The word died suddenly on her lips. Suddenly she stopped moving. She stood arrested, like a wax figure in a museum—only her chest moved slightly with her

breathing. Jabe made a move toward her, but one of the armed men stopped him.

"No," said the voice in his head. "She's in stasis until we leave. Better not touch her."

Jabe turned numbly toward them.

"No . . ." he said. "I sent recordings that proved these people were different. You know about them. What she says isn't what it sounds like. I tell you, those recordings. . . ."

"I'm sorry," said the voice. Both men were looking at him with something like pity on their faces. "You're overadapted, Jabe. You must have suspected it yourself. You couldn't seriously believe that thousands of men working over a ten year period could come to a wrong conclusion. Or that that report Moran was going to send in would be the only way we'd have of knowing about things here—"

"I tell you no!" said Jabe, breaking in. "I *know* these people here. They're different. Maybe I am a little . . . overadapted. But these people operate according to standards of justice and conscience. It's not just taboo and ritual, not just—"

"Come along, Jabe," said the voice and the two men moved in on him. "You'll have a chance to talk, later."

"No," he said, backing away from them. People were beginning to stream past outside the front window. Jabe evaded the two men and went to the door, opening it. At the top of the street, leading from the square, two of the bachelors appeared carrying rifles. The prisoner walked silently between them.

"Jabe—" began the voice in his head.

"I tell you, no!" said Jabe, desperately. "Sheila's expecting. She makes things sound different than they are."

"Oh, Jabe!" said one of two women, hurrying past.

"Did you hear about the jam? You'll have to tell Sheila!"

"Jam?" said Jabe, stupidly.

"That marauder. They asked him what he wanted and he wanted bread and jam, for a last meal. Imagine. Two pounds he ate! Not my jam, thank goodness—"

"Come on, Etty!" said the other woman. "All the good places'll be gone—" They hurried off.

The two bachelors with the rifles and the prisoner were only a few steps behind the women.

"Wait—" said Jabe, desperately.

The bachelors stopped at the command of a senior and married man. The prisoner also stopped. He had not been cleaned up, in his ragged suit of badly-tanned hide, except for a clean white bandage on his arm. The whites of his eyes were as clear as a child's and his beard was the soft silk of adolescence. All three of them looked inquiringly at Jabe.

"Wait," said Jabe again, unnecessarily. He appealed to the nearest bachelor. "Why did Manager Lenkhart do this?"

The bachelor frowned, looked at the other bachelor, then back at Jabe. He guffawed in uneasy fashion.

"What was his reason?" said Jabe.

The bachelor shrugged elaborately. He looked at the ground, spat, and kicked a pebble aside.

"We've got to get going," said the other bachelor. He looked over at the prisoner, who had moved aside to reach up and feel the low edge of the metal roof on Jabe's cottage, the roof made of corrugated aluminum.

"Silver," he said, glancing a moment at Jabe. "It's mighty rich—and fine."

The bachelors guffawed again. They took the prisoner's elbows and marched him off, down the slope of the road.

"You see there? You see?" said Jabe, staring after them, but speaking to the invisible warders just behind him. "He thought the sheet metal was silver, that the roofs were made of silver. There's your true degenerate. But the men with him—"

"Let's go, Jabe," said the voice gently in his head. He felt the warders take hold of him on either side. Invisibly, they led him out into the street, on the same way down which the other prisoner had already gone. He felt the uselessness of it all suddenly cresting over him like a wave, the sudden realization that there was no hope and there had never been any hope, no matter how he had tried to delude himself. He had known it from the beginning; but something in him would not let him admit the truth about these people—about his own wife, and his own child soon to be born—to himself.

From the beginning he had known that there was no saving them. Yet he had tried anyway—had killed his own brother in an attempt he knew was quite hopeless, to save a people who were already regressing to the animal. Why? Why had he done it? He could not say.

All he knew was that there had never been any choice about it—for him. He had done what he had to do.

"Come along now," said the gentle voice in his head. Dumbly, and plodding like a donkey, he let them lead him as they would. To where, it no longer mattered.



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